

THE INDEPENDENT

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WEATHER: Cloudy and windy

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The Tabloid

The Tabloid

Fashion:
prepare to take
the plunge

**Enough of the
joys of sex**

Comment

**Britain is feeling
good again**

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**Major
claims
credit
for cool
Britain**

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

John Major last night painted himself as the architect of Cool Britannia that rules the pop music airwaves, has taken over the fashion catwalks of Paris and upstaged Broadway.

Just three years ago Mr Major was evoking a Britain of warm beer, cycling old men, county cricket grounds and morning mist.

But last night, in his speech to the Lord Mayor's banquet, he dramatically changed his sales pitch to a Britain of packed pubs and clubs, streets bustling with foreign tourists and a capital city described in Newsweek as "the coolest city on the planet".

He urged the voters to ignore the "professional pessimists" and realise how much of a trend-setter Britain had become under his leadership.

Mr Major said that having come through "an industrial and economic revolution", with inflation subdued and the boom-bust cycle broken, Britain now faced the prospect of becoming one of the world's most successful global trading nations in the 21st century.

The only thing that Britain lacked was self-confidence: "The last crucial ingredient for our future success."

He said there were always people ready to write Britain off.

"They are always wrong. Listening to the political debate you might sometimes get the impression that confidence is something we don't have as a nation, or even that it's something we can't have."

But if people lifted their eyes above the charmed circle of London-based doom-mongers they would get an entirely different picture.

"The City of London has the greatest concentration of foreign banks in the world," Mr Major said.

"Britain has won more Nobel prizes than any nation except the US... Britain has won a third of all Oscars in the last 30 years. Our streets are busting with foreign tourists."

"Our pubs, clubs and restaurants are packed. Our television programmes are in demand worldwide. Our education system attracts half a million foreign students a year. Our exports give the lead to Broadway."

"Our pop culture rules the airwaves. Our country has taken over the fashion catwalks of Paris."

Mr Major said it was time to "parade our virtues" as a country. "To show - at home and abroad - how far Britain has come in economic progress and in the quality of our life and culture."

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If the European Court rules today that British employees should work no more than 48 hours a week and have statutory paid holidays, John Major will move to revoke these rights after the general election.

"That means they will go into the next election asking people to vote for a holiday-free Britain," a senior Labour source told *The Independent* last night.

Under the terms of the Working Time Directive, all workers would have automatic entitlement to three weeks annual paid holiday. Labour estimates that nearly 2.5 million British employees - 12 per cent of the workforce - get no paid holiday leave.

"Britain is the only country

in the European Union where employees have no legal right to paid holiday," a Labour spokesman said.

The Government has decided to implement the directive almost immediately and then, if re-elected next year, will try to change the governing European Treaty.

In a speech to the Lord Mayor's banquet at the Guildhall, the Prime Minister last night repeated that the Government would threaten to veto any further European Treaty unless it included guaranteed cover for a British opt-out from employment legislation like the directive.

A government source said later that Mr Major did not want the Working Time Directive to apply to Britain: any treaty change would have to be referred to the European Court.

"That is why the Working Time Directive, on which a European Court judgement is expected tomorrow, represents an important point of principle.

respective and allow British exemption from the provisions of the directive.

This means that if the European Court upholds the directive today, as expected, ministers will implement it as soon as possible. Mr Major will then seek its revocation in a new treaty that is due to be concluded in Amsterdam next June - if he is re-elected in an expected May election.

In his Guildhall speech, the Prime Minister said the Government would continue to resist proposals that would damage British competitiveness, costing the country markets and losing jobs.

"That is why the Working Time Directive, on which a European Court judgement is expected tomorrow, represents an important point of principle.

"We are in favour of good working conditions in good working conditions. They are very important.

"But the basic employee protections are long-established in common law. There's no case for extra prescriptive legislation from Europe - imposed by qualified majority voting against British objections - on matters that are now best resolved between employer and employee.

"That is why, if the court rules against us, we will require changes in European law to reinforce Britain's protection from such legislation. Our partners know that. And they know that we shall insist upon these changes before they can conclude any new agreements at the Inter-Governmental Conference next year."

48-hour week and you, page 4

Tories intend to revoke Europe's 48-hour week

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48-hour week and you, page 4

Hello boys...but it's goodbye girls

Magazine McDonnell
Media Correspondent

Is it more acceptable to show a woman in a bra than a man in underpants?

An underwear company is grappling with the apparent sexism at the heart of this question after being warned off running a poster campaign showing a male model wearing underpants.

Their proposed slogan of "The Loin King" and "Full Metal Packer" are thought too cheeky, so to speak. But are they more so than the Wonderbra advert which shot Eva Herzigová's cleavage to fame under the legend "Hello Boys"?

Kevin Higgs, founder of Brass Monkeys, said that the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP), an advisory arm of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), told him he should use a "smaller" model if he wanted his poster campaign to run, despite its appearance without problems in men's magazines.



Advertisement were not given the same advice. "It's double standards. If it was female underwear, it wouldn't be a problem," he said yesterday. "They are probably all old men at the ASA who think it's fine to have a sexy looking female for men to look at, but you couldn't trust ladies on the high street with a picture of a good-looking man. It's ridiculous."

Mr Higgs said members of CAP told him that an advertisement for Club 18-30, which featured a man's crotch over the slogan "Girls, can we interest you in a package holiday?" had also had to be withdrawn. "I said, 'we're doing men's underpants. What do they want us to do? We can hardly put the underpants on his head.'

A spokesman for the committee explained breasts were considered more acceptable than groins. "People will appreciate there's a difference between focusing on the groin area and the chest area in advertising," he said. But Susie Orbach, the best-selling feminist writer, said the ASA's distinction was bizarre. "We take it so much for granted that we can display and sell women's bodies that we don't even pause for thought. It takes trying to sell men through their bodies to make us pay attention."

Whitehall bids to run all schools

Fran Abrams
Education Correspondent

Ministers are considering plans which would effectively nationalise education by taking school spending away from local authorities.

The plan, put to ministers by a powerful government funding quango, would mean one of the biggest steps towards centralisation since the war.

The call from the Funding Agency for Schools, the body set up to finance and plan opting-out, has been backed by head teachers' and grant-maintained schools' organisations.

It has caused outrage among local authorities, which say it could mean the end of local democracy, and has also been criticised by the influential National Commission on Education.

Ministers are unlikely to act before the general election to remove local authorities' powers, but many Conservatives would like to see a manifesto pledge on the subject.

Some of them want the Government to pay the same amount for all pupils, regardless of where they live.

The funding agency has set out its proposals in response to government plans for a new national financing scheme for grant-maintained schools.

A spokesman for the agency, which has a big role in implementing educational reform such as increased selection and extra powers for grant-maintained schools, said some schools were much richer than others under the current system.

"Local authorities don't decide on the content of the cur-

riculum or teachers' pay or standards. This is a logical extension of a pattern that has developed in recent years," he said.

However, local authorities are horrified by the idea that they could lose control of school funding and believe that such a move would be tantamount to abolition. They would be left to administer a few closely regulated areas such as school transport and special educational

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Henry VIII: Schooled in the arts of centralised control

needs, but would have very little real power. Graham Lane, the chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities' education committee, described the move as "government by quango".

"This would destroy local government, and it would also destroy education for thousands of young people. I don't want a quango appointed by the Government running around interfering with locally elected bodies," he said. The proposal drew criticism from a number of quarters last night.

"It is very difficult for an agency based in York to make financial decisions which are sensitive to the needs of schools from Devon to Liverpool and from Norfolk to Carlisle," Mr Blunkett said.

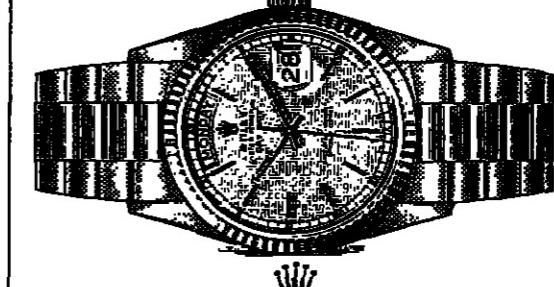
Lord Walton of Deuchant, chairman of the National Commission on Education, said it believed in local decision-making.

"At first sight I would feel uncomfortable about the total removal of all schools from any local authority democratic control," he said.

A spokesman for the Department of Education and Employment said a number of organisations wanted local authorities spending powers to be removed. Ministers were looking at their suggestions and at those on payment by results, he said. "We will look at it in the light of what people are saying and in the course of time ministers will decide what they want to do," he said.

Leading article, page 13

WHERE TO ACQUIRE A TASTE FOR OYSTERS

ROLEX
of Geneva

The seamless Oyster shell of a Rolex chronometer is hewn from a single block of stainless steel, 18ct gold or platinum. Within it lies a self-winding movement that has taken over a year to create. With prices starting at £1,400, the Oyster you always promised yourself is available from the Harrods Watch Department on the Ground Floor.

Not, we might add, from the Food Hall.

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KINGSTON

Harrods, Knightsbridge SW1X 7XL. Telephone 0171-730 1234.

*Watch shown available in 18ct yellow gold priced £10,450,
white gold £11,450 and platinum £12,450.



Sizing them up: Deep cleavage is OK, but a smaller model is ordered for the underpants

advertisement were not given the same advice. "It's double standards. If it was female underwear, it wouldn't be a problem," he said yesterday. "They are probably all old men at the ASA who think it's fine to have a sexy looking female for men to look at, but you couldn't trust ladies on the high street with a picture of a good-looking man. It's ridiculous."

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news

Short, sharp sound-bite snaps at Britannia

It is a useful convention that when the Government has a big piece of legislation planned, it issues something called a White Paper, setting out what it intends to do. By reverse logic you would have thought that when it hasn't, it doesn't.

So when the clever Scots lawyer, Malcolm Rifkind - Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs - rose in the House of Commons to make a statement about his new White Paper, entitled "Free Trade And Foreign Policy - A Global Vision", wild horses would not have dragged me away from a Chamber in which History was about to be made. For when the words "Global Vision" are on the front of a "White



DAVID AARONOVITCH

Paper", the link has surely been made between great thoughts and great deeds - deeds against which the Labours of Hercules would seem puny and insignificant. And they said this government had run out of steam!

Here is what Mr Rifkind said. I have filtered out the clichés and unnecessary pieces of political piffle, leaving the distilled essence and most

determinative passages from his statement.

"Madam Speaker, The Government's objectives are wide-ranging [including] progress in implementing existing commitments, completing ongoing negotiations and initiating a further substantial liberalising work programme, and then a final poosh [Rifkindian for "push"] forward to achieve the target of global free trade by 2020. The Government is clear that free-market policies are best. Political developments over the last decade have created new opportunities. Throughout the world security and stability are an essential prerequisite for markets to function smoothly. Britain is an Atlantic as well as a European nation."

We are determined to open up new opportunities. The Government has the vision to set this bold policy objective. It is our 2020 vision of the world."

Having unleashed this torrent of fresh, exciting new ideas on the House, Mr Rifkind could be forgiven for getting all shirty when his opposite number, Robin Cook, suggested that the White Paper wasn't worth the paper it was printed on. "A farago of nonsense", was how Mr Rifkind described Cook's intervention, and one which indicated the "difference between sound-bite and strategy".

The difference being (as far as I can see), that one is short and meaningless, and the other is interminable and meaningless.

Earlier Deputy Prime Minister's questions had brought together three of the most emblematic men in the Government. Captain Charisma, Hezza himself, facing trouble over charges of wanting to suborn the civil service; Planetbrain David Willetts, Paymaster-General, was due up before some investigation, accused of committee tampering whilst a whip; and Roger Freeman, who - with his slicked-back hair, pinstripe suit, utterly bland appearance and way with platitudes - is a police artist's impression of a politician.

Heseltine outraged innocence was masterful. Having initiated the idea of civil servants undertaking work on behalf of the Conservative Party, it was he, himself, who (with a little

assistance from Sir Robin Butler) had stopped it! Willets blushed and fumbled through his answers, his mind (engagingly) elsewhere. Mr Freeman slipped and slid between his questioners, with an aplomb that would have done credit to a figure skater.

It was, however, Labour's Tony Banks (who increasingly resembles the ex-dancer and celebrity Lionel Blair both physically and in terms of his act) who summed up the mood. "There are 12 unexploded bombs in my constituency. [Hear, hear] roared his colleague Paul Flynn, for no reason that I could discern." And it's most unpleasant to think that you might be living over one of them." Amen, said Messrs Heseltine and Willetts.

significant shorts

Row deepens over genetic engineering

British consumer groups and supermarkets added their voices to a growing European row over the lack of identification of American genetically-modified soya beans, which will soon be incorporated into hundreds of foods, such as bread, margarine and chocolate.

The Consumers' Association called on the Government to take action to force food producers to label foodstuffs which could contain the altered soya beans. The first shipments - mixed irrevocably with normal soya beans - arrived by ship from the US in Germany and Holland last week.

Meanwhile, Sainsbury's and Asda said they were working with suppliers to provide alternative sources of unmodified soya beans and provide full information to customers. The frozen food chain, Iceland, said in a letter to Greenpeace that it felt that Monsanto, which developed the "Roundup Ready" bean to be resistant to one of its herbicides, had been "irresponsible" in letting the beans into the marketplace. *Charles Arthur*

Lange to star in West End Desire'

Hollywood star Jessica Lange will make her West End debut as Blanche DuBois in Tennessee Williams's classic play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, it was confirmed yesterday. In the role that Vivien Leigh made her own in the classic 1951 film, 46-year-old Lange will act opposite Toby Stephens, son of Maggie Smith and the late Sir Robert Stephens, as Stanley Kowalski.

Lange made her Broadway debut with the play in 1992, co-starring with Alec Baldwin, and it was later made into a film. Since then she has received a Best Actress Oscar for her part in the film *Blue Sky* last year.

The new production is directed by Sir Peter Hall. Previews run from 18 December for an open-ended season at the Theatre Royal in the Haymarket.

Killer wins legal aid fight

A double killer has been granted legal aid in his bid to become the first prisoner to have a sex change operation.

Doug Wakefield, 49, serving life at Frankland Jail, Durham, wants to sue the Prison Service for the right to have surgery on the NHS. Wakefield, who answers only to the name Dee, was convicted at Leeds Crown Court 22 years ago of murdering his uncle with a garden fork and then burying the body in a garden.

He later received a manslaughter conviction after killing a fellow prisoner at Parkhurst Prison on the Isle of Wight. Regarded as one of the most violent men behind bars, he twice took prison officers hostage, trying to kill one of them.

Britons face drug charges

Two Britons have been charged with attempting to smuggle more than 20lbs of cocaine out of Venezuela.

James Miles, 18, and Paul Loseby, 20, will probably go on trial within eight months. The two have not been sent to the notorious La Planta Prison, where guards recently killed 30 prisoners who rioted over their conditions.

Instead, they are being held in police cells in the capital, Caracas.

The Venezuelan ambassador to the UK said they were arrested a week ago after a tip from Interpol that two "mules" would try to smuggle cocaine strapped to their bodies.

Postal vote on £20m Said gift

Dons at Oxford University are to have a postal vote on plans for a £40m business school, partly funded by the Middle Eastern businessman, *Stephen Goodwin*.

Around 3,200 academics will decide whether the new school, backed by a £20million donation from Said, should be built on a university sports ground in the centre of the city. Last week, the university's parliament voted by 259 to 214 not to release the site. *Fran Abrams*

Heaney on prize shortlist

Seamus Heaney and Adrian Mitchell are among 10 poets on the shortlist for the £5,000 T S Eliot prize, announced yesterday. Judges Andrew Motion, Helen Dunmore and Ruth Padel picked the list of the 10 best collections of the year, and will also choose the eventual winner, to be announced on 13 January.

Eliot's widow, Valerie, has donated the £5,000 prize.

The full shortlist is:

Ciaran Carson for *Open Et Cetera*,

Maura Dooley for *Kissing A Bone*,

John Fuller for *Stones and Fines*,

Seamus Heaney for *The Spirit Level*,

Stephen Knight for *Dream City*,

Cinema,

Adrian Mitchell for *Blue Coffee*,

Les Murray for *Subhuman Redneck Poems*,

Alice Oswald for *The Thing In The Gap-Stone Stile*,

Christopher Reid for *Expanded Universes* and

Susan Wicks for *The Clever Daughter*.

Women risk bad hair days

Women who make it to the boardroom may have to face an unforeseen battle - keeping their hair on. Hair loss is as serious a problem for women as it is for men because of the lifestyle and stresses brought about by equal opportunities.

According to a report in the magazine, *Hair International*.

Jonathan Cape, editor of *Hair International*, said: "A new generation of high-powered women are prime targets for the increased stress levels and poor diet which tend to go hand-in-hand with business responsibility."

In shops, stations, airports and schools, a busy world stopped turning



All quiet: The war memorial at Ickleton, Cambridgeshire, yesterday at 11am. Photograph: Brian Harris Those observing the silence around the country included, clockwise, a soldier in Belfast, Newcastle station, at Cadbury's plant in Birmingham and Marks and Spencers store at Marble Arch, central London. Photographs: Newsteam/Pacemaker

Records show grim toils of war

Jojo Moyes and Jessica Gawluk

Arthur Cockerill stands out from his 15 fellow soldiers in the sepia-tinted photograph of the Royal Engineers. His plump cheeks make him look curiously young next to his comrades; and he is the only one with an unlit cigarette in his mouth.

"We've only just realised,"

said his son, also Arthur, yesterday. "Look at his baby face. It looks like a bit of bravado. It may well have been: Arthur, senior, was only 17 at the time - two years younger than I was in careful, joined-up writing on his enlisting papers."

Arthur Cockerill's records, some of which have been damaged by fire during the Blitz, are among those just released by the

Public Records Office for Armistice Day yesterday.

His two sons, Arthur and John, were at the office yesterday, looking for clues to the wartime experiences of someone who, in his own lifetime, had preferred to say little.

What they found was that Arthur Cockerill, of Robin Hood's Bay in Yorkshire, enlisted at the beginning of the

First World War, giving his false date of birth as 1895. His medical records show he was hospitalised three times, but gave no reason. This was because he had been repeatedly gassed with Phosgene, something unknown to his sons.

"Although he was gassed three times, you can see his medical condition was written as A1," said Arthur junior yesterday. That was not how his sons remembered him.

"We'll always remember him as rather unwell. He was very ill, especially in later life. He had very little lung function. When he died it was the result of an operation for which he couldn't have an anaesthetic," said John.

Their father was transferred to the reserves in 1919 and given a 25 per cent pension. In 1923 that was reduced to 20 per cent. "He was a man of great spirit, but by the time he was 55 he could no longer work," Arthur junior said. He was given a full pension in 1953.

Cockerill's tale is just one of thousands which have come to light with the release of 33,000 boxes of documents yesterday detailing the records of men who served in the British Army between 1914 and 1920.

Also among them was the war poet Ivor Gurney. Although he was commemorated at Westminster Abbey's Poet's Corner, records show he met his death in a far less celebrated manner, dying in a mental institution in 1937.

In April 1917, Gurney had been wounded, but not enough, as he wrote to Marion Scott, to be sent home. "Well, I am wounded: but not badly; perhaps not badly enough: as although kind people told me it meant Blighty for me, yet here I am at Rouen marked 'tense' ...

It was during an attack on

Good Friday night that a bullet hit me and went clean through the right arm, just underneath the shoulder ... it hurt badly for half an hour, but now hurts not at all."

Gurney was gassed at Passchendaele seven months later and suffered a mental collapse in 1918. During the next four years he tried to settle into various jobs, including cinema pianist, clerk and farmworker, while often sleeping rough. He wrote much of his poetry during this time, before being committed in 1920.

Gurney's and Arthur Cockerill's records are on temporary display at the Records Office, along with those of the war artist Sir Stanley Spencer and the actor Ronald Coleman to commemorate the records' release.

Arthur Cockerill junior, who donated the early photographs of his father, said yesterday that despite his father's unwillingness to talk about the war, he would have "had a chuckle" to see himself commemorated and his records on public display. "Especially being on the wall next to Ronald Coleman," he added.

'Sadist in Nazi garb killed men for fun'

Jonathan Foster

A sadistic and predatory homosexual became a serial killer for fun, stabbing four men in murders which left him feeling "at peace", a court was told yesterday.

Peter Moore's wardrobe had strong Nazi influences. Alex Carlile, QC, for the prosecution, said at Mold Crown Court in north Wales. He liked to wear black leather when lurking at the meeting places of homosexuals. "The man in black - black thoughts and the blackest of deeds," Mr Carlile said.

Moore, 50, of Kinnel Bay, Flintshire, admitted during protracted police questioning to more than 17 attacks over 20 years, none of them homicidal.

But in May 1994, his mother died, an event which may have triggered "an extremely ugly change in character", Mr Carlile said.

Moore, owner of four small cinemas, denies four charges of murder. The killings were carried out during three months beginning in September last year. Mr Carlile said Moore had

met the victims by chance. He expected to be caught after ending his killing spree with the murder of his bank manager.

His first victim, Henry Roberts, 56, coincidentally shared with his killer an enthusiasm for Nazi paraphernalia. Mr Roberts tried to protest he was not Jewish as Moore launched 27 blows with a combat knife he had bought a few days earlier for £25. The body was left in the yard outside Mr Roberts' isolated home near Valley, Anglesey.

A month later, Keith Randles, 49, a security manager, opened the door of his caravan late at night on a construction site near Mona, Anglesey, to be attacked by Moore, who stabbed him 12 times. Moore later told police that when Mr Randles asked why he was being attacked, he was told it was for fun. "He looked non-plussed," Moore allegedly had said.

Moore's other victim was killed between October and December 1995. Edward Carthy, 28, from Birkhead, was a drug addict and drunk whom Moore met in a homosexual bar in Liverpool. Mr Carthy said. The pair drove to North Wales, Mr Carthy drunk but trying to escape from Moore's van. He was stabbed to death and buried in dense forest near Ruthin.

The trial continues.

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Back Issues

Back issues of the *Independent* are available from:

His name is synonymous with the West End musical, but last night Cameron Mackintosh faced his biggest test



Determined to succeed: Sir Cameron Mackintosh (right, at a production of 'Cats') is hoping to turn round 'Martin Guerre' (left) despite the critics' attacks

Photographs: PA

Can theatre's man with the Midas touch restore his shine?

David Lister
Arts News Editor

Theatre watchers on both sides of the Atlantic were waiting last night to see whether the West End's producer with the Midas touch had lost his grip on the public pulse or pulled off another miracle.

Sir Cameron Mackintosh's £4m musical of *Martin Guerre*, the soldier who returns to his village after years away and re-encounters his wife, itself returned after a short break with a £500,000 facelift.

Critics arrived at the Prince Edward Theatre to re-review the show they attacked in July as being at times incomprehensible and lacking a memorable score.

They would not normally re-review a show that has been revised during its run. But a Cameron Mackintosh

show is not normal in any sense of the word.

The 50-year-old impresario has been producing in the West End since the age of 20 but since 1981 and his hit *Cats*, a new Cameron Mackintosh production has been a theatrical event and its success or failure a barometer for the state of the musical, the West End, and, not wholly impartially, Britain's balance of payments.

So far *Martin Guerre* has not cut the mustard. It has been averaging 50 per cent houses. For the producer of *Les Misérables*, *Miss Saigon* and *The Phantom Of The Opera* that is a slap in the face. It is above-break-even point (that is £140,000 a week but only just). And only just is not enough for investors in a West End show. Some weeks it has even dipped below

break-even and with advance bookings beginning to slide its health was looking precarious.

Besides, the financial side of this story is only a part of it. There is also Sir Cameron's own psyche to take into account. The man whose first job was sweeping the stage on the first production of Lionel Bart's *Oliver* has come to represent West End theatre.

He even has a revival of *Oliver* at the London Palladium and generously gives Bart a percentage of the takings. He owns two West End theatres, the Prince Edward and the Prince of Wales, and is keen to acquire more. He is self effacing, popular and generous, but he is no longer used to failure.

Last night Sir Cameron himself arrived at the Prince Edward Theatre armed with statistics.

To anyone who asks him if his £4m musical can be saved, even with the substantial rewrite and re-direction that last night's relaunch showed, Sir Cameron can produce three pages of research about great musicals that needed time to settle.

Oklahoma, he will tell you, was considered a disaster and its premiere was dismissed with one classic quote "No Gals, No Gags, No Chance". *West Side Story*, *Porgy And Bess* and *Carousel* also suffered early reverses. Even his own *Les Misérables* was "considerably modified" after a shaky start.

If this sounds like the reaction of a worried man, or a man eager to justify his decision to relaunch a much criticised show and save a £25m investment, it could be because Britain's most successful theatrical producer, the multimillionaire with

the Midas touch, has been having a rocky time.

A year that started with a knight hood recently turned sour with *Martin Guerre*. After initial reviews found the show incomprehensible and lacking a memorable score it played to barely adequate houses. Advances plummeted after unfavourable and sometimes inaccurate press coverage from £25,000 a day to £10,000 a day.

He has now ploughed a further £500,000 into revamping *Martin Guerre*, changing, he claims, up to 60 per cent of the show in the process.

A trip across the Atlantic last month offered little solace. Looking in on the Broadway production of *Les Misérables* Sir Cameron found it looking stale with 19-year-old students being played by actors well into their 40s. He decided to sack a size-

able number of the cast and found himself in conflict, not for the first time, with American Equity.

Part of the problem is Sir Cameron's perfectionism. He likes to see his blockbuster shows kept fresh with regular cast renewals even when they are displaying housefull notices. Part of the problem is his self belief. After after years of massive success he agrees that it is "psychologically difficult to accept that a show may have failed". It is this same bullish self belief that allows him to claim that while sacking cast members of *Les Misérables* he is their champion in the fight for better contracts on Broadway.

And so last night saw a second night, a second wave of high profile show publicity, a second stylish after show party and the same set of critics writing a second set of reviews.

The six musicals you should see first

Miss Saigon: Everything that *Martin Guerre* should have been. This production is both gripping, visually striking with helicopter et al, and its climax (even for those who have seen it before in *Madam Butterfly*) is so poignant one can hear the sniffles all round the theatre. The *Martin Guerre* composers Boublil and Schonberg give *Miss Saigon* a score both stirring and tender.

Sunset Boulevard: Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber's most recent creation was revamped à la *Martin Guerre* and is all the stronger for it. At least three showstoppers in a compelling and ultimately quite moving production, even if the current Norma Desmond, Petula Clark, is not the most obvious nor the most convincing choice.

Guys And Dolls: When Richard Eyre's production first appeared in 1980 theatregoers slept outside the National to buy tickets for the first time since Laurence Olivier's *Othello*. Next month's revival is a welcome return for a show with more humour and energy than all the other musicals in London put together. Imelda Staunton as Miss Adelaide should be a comic treat.

Oliver: Slightly anodyne direction by Sam Mendes in this revival, but Lionel Bart's music and the incorrigible rhymes in his lyrics ('Oliver, that was the mite with the large appetite') more than stand the test of time. It is a tribute to the generosity of producer Cameron Mackintosh that he is giving Bart a share of the royalties, even though there is no contractual obligation to do so.

The Phantom Of The Opera: Another Mackintosh production, another Lloyd Webber score; both enhanced by direction and design which give the story a disturbing atmosphere. More memorable than the longer running *Cats* by the same producer-composer team, and the only show in town for which you really do have to book up months ahead.

Blood Brothers: Not a Mackintosh or Lloyd Webber in sight, but this Willy Russell show engenders great affection. A Liverpool sob story on a smaller scale than its blockbuster neighbours, it has proved a genuine family hit and could yet outlast its richer and more famous musical competitors.

David Lister

Butter imports spread new discord with New Zealand

David Barber in Wellington, New Zealand
Charlie Bain

Relations have soured between Britain and New Zealand amid allegations of a Europe-wide campaign to protect home producers against butter imports.

The row centres on the import of spreadable butter, which is malleable straight from the fridge and has quickly become a popular alternative to blocks of spread hard enough to bend knives and tear bread. Anchor is at present the only company selling the product in the UK and has enjoyed booming sales as a result.

This success was soured last week when several New Zealand Dairy Board executives in Britain were technically "arrested" by UK Customs and Excise officers who claimed that technically the product was not butter as defined by the EU. Although the raw materials are the same, the manufacturing process for the new product is different.

Sir Dryden Spring, chairman of the New Zealand Dairy Board, reacted angrily to the claim, saying British Customs was trying to block imports of spreadable butter from New Zealand by alleging it did not qualify for entry under the EU quota for reduced import duty.

Under international trade rules, New Zealand has been allowed to export nearly 77,000 tonnes of butter a year to the EU. The Board saw last week's move as part of a bid to erect trade barriers and protect European dairy farmers. Sir Dryden said it was another example



A question of duty: EU regulations mean Anchor spreadable butter is ineligible for a concession on import tariff

of the dairy trade being "subject to interference, control and distortion by foreign governments". He likened trading with the EU to peeling "the layers of an onion - there is always another restriction underneath".

Neville Martin, a spokesman for the New Zealand Dairy

Board added: "Under the British investigation, officials are looking at everything they can get their hands on to New Zealand butter. Some of it smacks strongly of attempts to slap non-tariff trade barriers on New Zealand."

The board refused to say how many of its officials were

UK Customs and Excise were equally cagey. Although officials spent yesterday morning deep in discussion on the subject, they later refused to give details, saying that they didn't comment on individual cases.

However, they did confirm that they had received a written ruling from the European Commission four months ago saying that spreadable butter from New Zealand did not meet the qualifying conditions to benefit from the reduced import duty.

The ruling said the reason for this apparently was because it is not "directly manufactured from milk and cream", a spokeswoman said yesterday.

The move could spell disaster for Anchor, which has seen sales rise sharply by 33 per cent, year on year, since the new butter was launched in Britain in 1993. The firm sold 5,000 tonnes of spreadable butter last year.

If the British move succeeds, spreadable butter would be subject to a punitive rate of duty which would remove it from British shops. The New Zealand government has taken up the issue with the European Commission in Brussels.

The British inquiry follows the seizure of a shipment of New Zealand Anchor butter by Dutch Customs in September last year. The Dutch claimed tests showed the butter contained too much fat to qualify for entry under New Zealand's EU quota and imposed an extra duty of NZ\$1.8m. New Zealand has lodged an appeal and the case is continuing.

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Brown under fire over Social Chapter plans

John Rentoul and Michael Harrison

Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor, defended Labour's promise to sign the European Social Chapter to the CBI conference yesterday, under hostile fire from government ministers.

Despite advance headlines proclaiming that he would not give up Britain's power to block some social legislation, he stuck

to Labour's existing policy, which is to give up blocking powers in some areas but not in others.

Mr Brown told the CBI in Harrogate that a Labour government would not accept the extension of majority voting to matters of social security or require companies to appoint migrant workers, and funds for job creation.

Ian Lang, President of the Board of Trade, accused Mr Brown of trying to perpetrate a

"disgraceful con-trick". He said Mr Brown – like Tony Blair in his speech to the CBI last year – was trying to give the impression that Britain could choose which aspects of the Social Chapter it accepted.

"When Tony Blair suggested last year that Labour could 'pick and mix' from the Social Chapter, his deception was put down to naivety. For Gordon Brown to try to pull the same

deception again this year is treating British business with contempt," Mr Lang said.

He was backed by Michael Heseltine, the deputy prime minister, who pointed out that signing up to the Social Chapter – which Labour has promised to do by 1 January 1998 – would commit Britain to accepting the outcome of majority votes on the existing core headings of the Chapter.

"It is not an à la carte menu," Mr Heseltine said.

The Social Chapter, a protocol attached to the Maastricht Treaty from which the Prime Minister negotiated an opt-out for Britain, provides for majority voting on five subjects, including the broadly-defined "working conditions".

Michael Portillo, Secretary of State for Defence, also in Harrogate, described the Chapter

as "a catalogue of job-destroying measures" based on "an outdated, trade union-driven anti-management agenda".

He added: "It is also immoral because it offers the prospect of rights and benefits to some which can only be provided by putting others out of work."

Mr Brown, also gave his clearest indication yet that a Labour government would set its inflation target at or below

the present 2.5 per cent level. "We will not be satisfied with simply talking as tough as the Tories. For, unlike the government, we plan to deliver on our inflation target," he said.

Mr Brown's aides pointed out that the present underlying inflation rate, 2.9 per cent, is not only well above the target for the end of this parliament, it is also higher than the European Union average of 2.4 per cent.

Dear Tony, Don't you worry about being too smarmy. Bill had the same problem ...

John Rentoul
Political Correspondent

President Clinton's advisers have already drawn up a strategy for Tony Blair in the run-up to the election, designed to deal with the perception that the Labour leader is too packaged and comes from a privileged background.

With George Stephanopoulos, one of the American President's closest aides, set to travel to Britain to talk to Labour's election team, secret memo drawn up for Mr Clinton in the 1992 presidential campaign provide a striking insight into American thinking.

Some of the supposed problems faced by Mr Blair before the general election are uncannily similar to those facing Mr Clinton as he prepared to take on George Bush after winning the Democratic nomination. A report called the Manhattan Project listed his team's conclusions of research with small focus groups of floating voters:

1. Clinton is not real. He is packaged.
2. Clinton is privileged, like the Kennedys.

3. Clinton cannot stand up to the special interests.

4. Clinton cannot be the candidate of change.

5. Clinton is for himself, not for people.

6. Clinton's message-ideas are discounted.

The findings echo those of Labour's private poll, which identified some of the reasons older women in particular were sceptical about Mr Blair. He is thought to be smarmy, too smooth and even too much like an American political candidate. His privileged background and the rows over his and Harriet Harman's choice of school, reinforced perceptions that he "says one thing and does another".

The Manhattan Project document said: "The core problem of the Clinton candidacy is Clinton's essential 'political' nature." It recommended a "fundamental rethinking of your campaign", and concluded: "The campaign has to take radical steps to depoliticise Bill Clinton." In another memo Mandy Grunwald, a 1992 Clinton team member who visited Mr Blair at the time of his election to the Labour leadership, argued that "moments of passion, personal reflection and humor do more for us than any six-second soundbite on the national news".

Mr Clinton's advertisements recalled the moment, aged 15, when he stood up to his drunken stepmother, and the candidate fought back against sexual allegations on a television talk show, winning cheers from the studio audience by accusing the host of being "responsible for the cynicism in this country, you don't want to talk about the real issues".

On this side of the Atlantic Mr Blair departed from the text of his Blackpool conference speech last month to recall the moment, aged 11, when his father suffered a stroke that deprived him of the power of speech for three years.

The experience taught him the value of the family, he said. "I don't pretend to you that I had a deprived childhood; I didn't, but I learnt a sense of values in my childhood."

Although the similarities between the Clinton and Blair strategies are largely coincidental, the close contacts between the two camps mean that there is much common thinking.

The Clinton memos, revealed in Martin Walker's book, *The President They Deserve*, include Ms Grunwald's argument that, "in tandem with our high-road, serious speech effort, we ought to design a parallel track of pop culture national and local media efforts". This is similar to the approach pursued by Alastair Campbell, Mr Blair's press secretary, of selling the "real" Mr Blair to the tabloid press and popular broadcasters.

Makeover man: Labour is worried that Blair is seen as privileged

Packaging staff: Stephanopoulos, a Clinton adviser Photograph: Steve Liss/Katz

How the work directive affects you

Barrie Clement
Labour Editor

Who will the working directive affect?

The directive is designed to cover most of the working population, but it is imprecisely worded. The most predictable effect will be that the hours worked by lawyers will increase (and so will their earnings).

How many people work more than 48 hours?

Around 4 million regularly work more than 48 hours, but not all of them are covered.

Are we talking about 48 hours a week or an annual average?

The working time limit is meant to be averaged over a four-month reference period, but there is pro-

EU's 48-hour rule to open new era for employers and staff

vision for it to be extended by law or collective agreement to either six or 12 months.

Will it apply to staff in public and private sectors?

Yes. Public-sector workers and those who are employed by privatised companies, which are both considered to be "emanations of the state", have a better chance of invoking the directive from 23 November than workers elsewhere. Managers will be under an immediate obligation to comply; unions are prepared to take court action if their rights are ignored.

Which industries will be excluded?

Air, rail, road, sea, inland waterway, lake transport, sea fishing and maritime industries. However, the European Commission is planning legislation to include them eventually.

Any other exceptions?

Some employees will not be included even in industries which are covered by the directive. Exempted are employees who determine their own hours or where the amount of time they work is not measured or predetermined. Examples given are "managing executives or other persons with autonomous decision-making powers"; people who work for their families; and those who officiate at religious ceremonies. Doctors in training are also excluded.

What if someone refuses to work more than 48 hours?

Because the 48 hours is an average over a period, no one can suddenly down tools after 48 hours have elapsed. For employees to invoke the directive, they would have to prove they had been made to work more than 48 hours over a period of four months and that they were not categorised among the exceptions. Peter Reid, the expert on the subject at the Engineering Employers' Federation, believes a complainant might have to wait two or three years for a result.

What are the other main provisions?

An equally important clause gives a guaranteed minimum three weeks' annual leave rising to four weeks in 1999. Almost 2.5 million employees have no paid leave; 4.1 million get less than three weeks and 5.9 million are entitled to less than four weeks. Other provisions are a maximum average eight-hour shift in 24 hours for night workers; a rest break after six hours non-stop work; rest periods of 11 hours daily and 35 hours weekly.

In the end, will it make any difference?

The Government thinks not – because there are too many loopholes in the proposed legislation – while unions think they will be able to negotiate improvements.

Heseltine accused over Tory cheerleaders

John Rentoul
Political Correspondent

Michael Heseltine, the Deputy Prime Minister, insisted yesterday that his plan to recruit Conservative "cheerleaders" in the public services had never specified that it should be carried out by civil servants.

John Prescott, deputy Labour leader, told Mr Heseltine in the Commons that a leaked memorandum from him to the Prime Minister "shows that far from being the person who sorted out the scandal of civil servants being used for party political purposes, you were the man who had the idea to begin with. You were caught red handed trying

to subvert the impartiality of the Civil Service."

Mr Prescott demanded clarification of further apparent attempts to engage public servants in pro-Tory propaganda.

A new leaked document from Mr Heseltine's department said "representatives of the police and magistrates" should be involved in the initiative.

Labour also attacked the business tour by the President of the Board of Trade, Ian Lang, which, according to Margaret Beckett, Labour's trade spokeswoman, started yesterday "in one marginal seat and heading off for a few others, and is being organised by civil servants in the DTI and paid for by the DTI".

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Justice 150

news

Dangers of the wild now lurking on city streets



City dwellers: Traditionally shy, foxes may be losing their fear of humans as they become increasingly common in urban areas

Louise Jury

Wildlife experts expressed amazement yesterday at an attack by a fox on a baby in his pram in a city suburb.

Frank Wheeler, head of small mammals at London Zoo, and Dr David Macdonald, head of Oxford University's wildlife conservation research unit, said they were astounded at the reported incident.

The five-month-old baby, Phillip Sheppard, needed hospital treatment on Friday after he was bitten on the face.

Alerted by her son's crying, Elena Sheppard, 36, ran into the conservatory of her home in Norbury, south London, to find the fox on top of him.

Mrs Sheppard and her husband, Marc, 37, a computer consultant, said there was blood on the baby's mouth and teeth marks on his lips. He was put on a course of antibiotics after a check-up at the Mayday Hospital in Croydon.

Mrs Sheppard said yesterday: "The baby is OK, but it was a shock for him. The fox was biting my son's lips. I saw it with my own eyes. I would like people not to feed the foxes."

because they're not scared of people any more."

Dr David Macdonald, of Oxford University, said the incident was "astounding". Foxes normally ran away rather than come into contact with people.



Shocked: Elena Sheppard with baby son Phillip

hectares. "A lot of people get enormous pleasure from putting food out and watching foxes," he added.

Mr Wheeler at London Zoo said: "For a fox to attack a child in a house is something I've never heard of. They're naturally one of the shiest animals. They are not dangerous. They have a very weak bite. But there's a definite trend for them to lose their fear of people because they're not being hunted."

He said other country-side animals were also appearing in towns, such as rabbits. Rats and mice, now common, were rural inhabitants in the past.

Professor Stephen Harris of Bristol University has estimated there are about 420,000 adult foxes in Britain with 425,000 cubs born every year.

A spokeswoman for the Sheppards' local authority, the London Borough of Croydon, said they had adopted the London Wildlife Trust's fox code to inform residents and foxes to live alongside each other.

They issued advice to residents on how to deter foxes if they wanted to and if necessary their pest control people could try to catch nuisance animals.

Victory for parents over head's sacking

Judith Judd
Education Editor

Governors at Cheltenham College, whose dismissal of the school's head is being fought by parents, have agreed to an independent inquiry into the sacking.

The inquiry, to be carried out by Tony Higgins, chief executive of the Cheltenham-based Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, is examining whether the governors followed the correct procedures in dismissing Peter Wilkes.

Mr Wilkes was dismissed after the school slipped from 147th to 205th in A-level league tables. Governors who include General Sir John Waters, former deputy supreme allied commander Europe and Sir Michael Perry, chairman of Unilever, also criticised his managerial style and his relationships with senior staff.

But a meeting of parents voted by 620 to 7 in favour of Mr Wilkes' reinstatement and of the resignation of the school council (governors). They were also angry that they were initially given no explanation of the head's dismissal.

The case has highlighted the power of governors in private schools. All state schools are required to have elected parents on their governing bodies but independent schools are not. Cheltenham parents, who pay fees of around £12,000 a year, say they should be told more about what is going on.

When parents first asked for an explanation for Mr Wilkes' dismissal from Air Commodore

David Atherton, the council's secretary, they were told "matters between the council and its employees are confidential".

Later, governors sent a letter giving a more detailed explanation. They praised Mr Wilkes' gifts as a schoolmaster and his dedication to the school. They pointed out that the school's league table position was not the only reason for his dismissal, though they believed exam results were important.

Yesterday Mark Hicks Beach, chairman of the parents' committee, said the parents' demands were unchanged. "We are quite happy for Mr Higgins to investigate. We want to know the truth about the procedures behind Mr Wilkes' dismissal."

"We hope the inquiry will recommend that the constitution of Cheltenham College should be totally reorganised. There should be more local members and it should not be self-selecting."

He said parents should have more communication with the council but he was not sure that necessarily meant having elected parent governors.

Two governors have resigned in protest against the decision to give Mr Wilkes two terms' notice, but the rest of the council cannot constitutionally be forced to resign.

Parents met five members of the council on Friday and a further meeting will take place on Sunday.

They fear that the change of head will mean a change of ethos at the school and that pupils who are unlikely to excel in exams will be thrown out.

Woman student 'stalking lecturer'

A university lecturer claimed in court yesterday that he was being stalked by a woman student who believed he had "improper sexual desires" for her.

Dr Robert Fine, aged 50, is seeking a High Court injunction to stop Eileen McLardy both visiting him at Warwick University and his home and is claiming damages for 140 listed occasions of harassment between 1994 and 1995.

Ashley Underwood, who is representing the senior lecturer in sociology, said the incidents began when Mrs McLardy was a part-time student at the university. She was also nursing a sick mother and a child and "it appears she came under a great deal of stress and got it into her head that Dr Fine harboured some sort of improper sexual desires towards her".

"This turned into a vendetta against him," he told Judge Thompson QC.

Mr Underwood said Mrs McLardy, 30, constantly harassed outside his house in Newbold Terrace, Leamington Spa, "with an eerie fixed grimace on her face" until she had made sure she had been seen. He said Dr Fine's home was opposite a

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news

Jobs to die for – work takes grim toll on children of the world

Louise Jury

Child workers around the world are being exposed to a number of lethal hazards including pesticide poisoning and toxic fumes in sweat-shop factories.

And according to a United Nations report published today the problem is twice as big as was previously thought, with an estimated 250 million children being forced to work for their keep.

The rise in sexual exploitation for profit and risks of children working with chemicals and in dangerous industry require urgent action and a new international convention focusing on the worst abuses, the report claims.

The revised estimate of the scale of exploitation has been produced by the International Labour Office (ILO), the UN's

agency for work issues, using new methods of assessing the problem.

The ILO is now demanding the concentration of resources to tackle the most hazardous types of child labour. Assefa Bequele, the report's author, said yesterday: "We're not saying that any child labour is tolerable, but for pragmatic reasons we suggest that we should focus on the most intolerable forms."

Although international pressure and governmental action has improved the lives of many, Mr Bequele said there was evidence that where children were still employed, it tended to be in more dangerous situations. Children as young as three were reported in factories producing matches and fireworks.

The report claims 120 million children under the age of 14 work full time and 130 million

part time. The biggest problem was in Asia (153 million child workers), with 80 million in Africa, and 17.8 million in Latin America. However, Europe was not excluded with a rise in sexual exploitation in eastern European countries, including Kenya and Zimbabwe, are seeing a rise in the numbers involved.

■ Agriculture – Children can be found mixing, loading and applying pesticides and fertilisers, some of which are highly toxic

Mortality among Sri Lankan children farm workers from pesticides poisoning is reportedly greater than from a combination of diseases including malaria, tetanus, diphtheria and polio.

■ Ceramics and glass factory work – Common in Asia where children carry molten loads of glass. The temperature inside the factories ranges from 40 to 45°C and the noise level from machinery can be as high as 100

decibels. Other hazards include exposure to silica dust and lead and toxic fumes.

■ Deep-sea fishing – In many Asian countries, particularly Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, boys spend up to 12 hours in water banging on coral reefs to scare the fish into nets. Dozens are killed or injured each year from drowning or decompression illness.

Michelle Hansen, the

ILO's director-general, said child labour was one of the faces of poverty, and efforts over many years were required to eliminate it completely.

But she added: "There are some forms of child labour today which are intolerable by any standard. These deserve to be identified, exposed and eradicated without delay."

Mr Bequele said ILO's experience was that the problem

should not be left to governments alone. Community, labour and human rights groups had helped force improvements.

"When the ILO started expanding its programme on child labour about 10 years ago, there wasn't a single government that was prepared to work with us. But as a result of pressure there has been increasing concern from governments to do something about it."

Sweat shop: Child carpet-weavers in India work up to 12 hours a day, six days a week, in conditions which are dark, dangerous and poorly ventilated

Photograph: Ian Berry/Magnum

Child workers around the world are being exposed to a number of lethal hazards including pesticide poisoning and toxic fumes in sweat-shop factories.

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Former NHS manager faces investigation over contracts

Susan Emmett

A former senior health manager is facing investigation by auditors following allegations that he used his public post to set up two lucrative contracts with a private firm he later joined as director.

George Walker is alleged to have used his position as commissioning director for Sheffield

Health Authority to award contracts worth £35,000 to a new GP co-operative and £100,000 to Primary Care Multifund Ltd, a GP management company which manages the co-operative. He formally joined PCM as director the day after he retired from the health authority last August.

But a document lodged at Companies House and seen by

The Independent, shows that Mr Walker became director of PCM as early as 29 April.

The Sheffield Health Authority removed Mr Walker from his post as soon as they became aware of his involvement with PCM at the end of July. But he continued to work for the authority in another capacity until he took early retirement at the end of August.

There was a potential conflict of interest and we did not want any question of a conflict of interest," Cathy Hamlyn, health authority chief executive, said. "This is a matter of probity and public services do have to keep their standards."

The health authority has only

recently become aware of the document lodged at Companies House and the district audit of

office was asked to investigate at the beginning of October.

Although the £35,000 contract with the GP co-operative has been approved, the health authority is now waiting until the auditors complete their investigation before approving the contract with PCM.

Mr Walker's actions were initially exposed by the Sheffield Community Health Council,

and the way that Mr Walker behaved."

But Mr Walker said he was not actively involved with PCM until the beginning of September and that he thought the health authority was aware of his appointment. "All I did was act as a reference point for the forms that came in," he said. "I was basically a post box." In his former post at the

health authority, Mr Walker saw his role as encouraging self-helping in all its forms.

He said that his early involvement with PCM and setting up the new GP co-operative was part of his job and that he was happy to face investigation.

"I'm quite happy for the auditors to go in because I'm completely innocent," he said.

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TSB	12.9%	£137.95	£5,621.06
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من العمل

Hormones in sewage changing sex of fish

Nicholas Schoon
Environment Correspondent

Natural female hormones excreted by women can feminise male fish. Government research has revealed. The concentrations of naturally occurring human female hormones found in effluent from sewage works is extremely low – but still high enough to make male fish start to produce egg yolk protein.

The researchers from Brunel University and the Ministry of Agriculture's fisheries laboratory also found a hormone used in some contraceptive pills, ethinodiol, was emerging in the effluent. But it was getting through in smaller quantities than oestrogen and 17B oestradiol which occur naturally in women's urine.

The research was commissioned by the Government's Environment Agency, which has organised further studies to find out if these three hormones are affecting fish in rivers around the country.

"We have a very potent cocktail getting into rivers," said Dr Geoff Brighty, fisheries scientist with the agency. "We have to be precautionary and see if there is an impact."

The hormones exert their influence at an astonishingly low concentration – less than ten billionths of a gram per litre. That is equivalent to one gram of hormone in 100,000 tonnes of water, equivalent to a small lake. It required a genetically engineered strain of yeast to filter out the oestrogens.

More than 10 years ago it was found that some male roach in the river Lee and sewage settlement lagoons alongside it were becoming feminised – their testes were partially ovaries and contained eggs.

This discovery led to research programmes which showed that all around Britain

male trout and roach kept in cages next to sewage works' outlets started to produce the egg yolk protein vitellogenin. Something in the watery, cleaned-up effluent was feminising them.

The latest research, published today, establishes that it is the three female hormones

which are to blame – and not any of the tens of thousands of other chemicals found at low concentrations in sewage effluent.

The finding is significant because scientists have suggested that a wide range of synthesised chemicals used in detergents, plastic product manufacture and agriculture can act as oestrogen mimics.

There are places overseas where such chemicals have altered the sexual characteristics and behaviour of wildlife species after chronic pollution or accidental spillages.

There are fears that these chemicals are also contributing to falling sperm counts, genital malformations in baby boys and the rising incidence of testicular cancer in some western nations.

Environmental pressure groups are devoting increasing resources to campaigning about this threat.

"The Government is setting new targets for curbing pollution in an effort to improve the nation's health. They cover indoor and outdoor air quality, noise, lead in drinking water and levels of radon – a radioactive gas which wells up from the ground naturally and can cause lung cancer.

Hitting these targets depends as much upon the actions of local councils, doctors and public health officials, voluntary groups and individual families as it does upon the actions of central government, John Gummer, Secretary of State for the Environment, said yesterday.

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Lord Menuhin seeks benefactor to buy violin for young virtuoso, but it won't come cheap ...



Perfect harmony: Leland Chen, 31, plays the 1694 Stradivarius violin which he hopes will be his to play after its auction at Phillips next week

Photograph: Glynn Griffiths

300 and still in tune: what's so special about a Strad?

Marianne Macdonald
Arts Correspondent

A brilliant Taiwanese violinist has impressed Yehudi Menuhin that he has written an open letter asking for a benefactor to donate a violin worthy of the virtuoso.

Lord Menuhin has discovered that the perfect instrument does not come cheap. Leland Chen, 31, believes his perfect musical match is a 1694 Stradivarius, to be auctioned at Phillips on Tuesday next week. It is expected to fetch up to £700,000 – 70 times the value of his present instrument – and the only way he can play it is if a benefactor buys it for him.

The instrument, known as the Baillot-Pommereh violin after two of its earliest owners, has an unusual depth and tonal richness, even compared with the five other Stradivarius violins he has played. "It is the mar-

riage of the player and the instrument that makes a difference, and for some unknown reason this one seems to really work for me," Mr Chen said yesterday.

Maureen Phillips, Mr Chen's manager, has approached British Petroleum and BT – due to merge with MCI to create Concert – with the suggestion that they might buy the violin

and lend it to Mr Chen because their names have the appropriate initials or associations.

Although neither has yet made a commitment to sponsor Mr Chen, an unnamed woman

yesterday expressed interest in helping him financially after hearing of his plight on a radio programme.

"The only hope I have of getting it is if a group of people or

a company will buy it and I could have it on loan," he said. "But we have had very little time since we discovered the violin."

Antonio Stradivari, who died 259 years ago, would not be surprised to learn that he is still considered the maker of the world's finest violins, with followers including Anne-Sophie Mutter and Nigel Kennedy.

The plaque on his house in the Piazza Roma, in Cremona, Lombardy, notes that Stradivari "brought the violin to perfection and left to Cremona an imperishable name as master of his craft".

He learnt his trade in Nicolo Amati's workshop, and began putting his own name to violins in the 1660s. But it was only after 1684, when Stradivari turned to larger-bellied instruments, that his genius blossomed. He made the Baillot-Pommereh in 1694, but his finest violins are believed to date from 1700.



Lord Menuhin with Elgar, whose Violin Concerto he recorded in 1932. Photograph: EMI

Elvis, Lenin and the Stradivarius

■ The 'Mendelssohn' Stradivarius violin was the most expensive musical instrument, sold for £90,000 at Christie's in 1990

■ Stradivarius violins were covered in propolis – the same substance used to embalm Lenin's body

■ Elvis played the violin and is rumoured to have owned a Strad. Nigel Kennedy's Strad was sold to an American collector for \$1.5m

■ Julian Lloyd Webber's Strad cello is so precious to him that he sleeps with it every night by his bed.

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news

Incompetent dentists facing tough new curbs

Ian Burrell

Health ministers are preparing tough new disciplinary measures to curtail the activities of inadequate dentists who continue to work privately after being censured by disciplinary bodies following allegations against them over their NHS work.

Patients are alleged to have had metal dental instruments left inside their gums, healthy teeth destroyed by unnecessary treatment and been reduced to a diet of soup and soft foods. In other cases, dentists have claimed payment for work they have not done.

The measures, in a draft Bill which will form part of an amendment to the Dentists Act 1986, follow concern by the General Dental Council, the regulatory body for Britain's 30,000 dentists, that it does not have enough disciplinary powers.

The council is being asked to examine allegations concerning William Duff, a Glasgow dentist. Mr Duff who is in his thirties, until recently had a practice at Maryhill Road, Glasgow, and has now moved to Kil-



Biting back: The new disciplinary measures will offer greater protection for patients receiving treatment outside the National Health Service

barchan. Renfrewshire. Mr Duff was fined £1,500 and struck off a list of NHS-approved dentists by Greater Glasgow Health Board last year for failure to maintain ade-

quate records, but he can continue to work privately.

In its adjudication on the case of Moaine Russell, 33, the health board complained there were many discrepancies be-

tween Mrs Russell's treatment record and the form Mr Duff completed for NHS payment, and that he had claimed for work not completed.

Mr Duff's case is likely to go

before the council's professional conduct committee. Last night, in an adjournment debate in the House of Commons, Maria Fife, the Labour MP for Glasgow Maryhill, argued that

not enough is being done to safeguard patients who suffer lasting pain and disfigurement from shoddy dentistry.

She is concerned that the growth of the private sector is

making the problem worse.

On Friday, a High Court judge granted permission for 92 patients jointly to pursue damages against dentist Barry Garrett, who now practises in Sale, Cheshire. If their complaints are upheld Mr Garrett could face damages claims of up to £2m.

Last year, Mr Garrett, 48, was successfully sued for £185,000 by eight patients who said he had carried out unnecessary treatment on their healthy teeth. Mr Garrett had been struck off by the General Dental Council in 1989 for serious professional misconduct, but was allowed to return to work two years later.

The court was told that

patients he treated in Driffield, Humberside, were left traumatised. One victim, Jane Appleton, 25, had 99 tooth surfaces worked on unnecessarily. Dawn Elling, 29, had the broken end of a drill left in one of her teeth and complained that Mr Gar-

rett had laughed after she told him he was hurting her. Her £27,477 damages included £6,000 pounds for psychiatric treatment.

Melanie Fenton, who endured 30 two-hour appointments with Mr Garrett said: "I want this man struck off once and for all. No one should ever be at risk of being put through what we've suffered."

Mr Garrett, who has a degree in dental surgery from Dundee University, was insured and will have all his legal costs paid for by the Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland.

Nigel Walsh, a solicitor and former patient of Mr Garrett, who has represented most of the victims after settling out of court himself for £2,000, said: "The judge [in last year's case] recognised the gravity of what the dentist did, so now will the General Dental Council? And if not, why not?"

Stephen Hancock, spokesman for the General Dental Council, said: "The measures in this draft Bill will give the council a variety of extra powers involved with suspension and will also allow greater flexibility."

He said the new measures would give greater protection to dental patients who had treatment outside the NHS. A non-NHS patients' complaints procedure is being set up. It is something that we have been asking for for years."

Currently, private patients who believe they have been victims of sub-standard dentistry can only seek redress through the civil courts. The draft Bill will be completed by the end of next month and will be subject to a period of consultation.

A spokesman for the Department of Health said: "It's all to do with powers to act against misconduct in the dental profession and will bring dentists into line with the tight guidelines already imposed on GPs."

DAILY POEM

Airmail

By Kevin Crossley-Holland

*When my words fly
to you
I want them fast
and fiery as cardinals.*

*And soft, I add,
immeasurably soft, straying
and resolute –
thinking of your parts
(your lower lip, for instance).*

*But more than resolute:
I want them indestructible.
Made of air; and
wings to
made of shining steel.*

Enitharmon has just published Kevin Crossley-Holland's *The Language of Yes*, his first collection since *New and Selected Poems 1965-90*. A poet, but also a librettist, children's writer and translator of Anglo-Saxon tales – *Beowulf* and the *Exeter Book Riddles* amongst them – his work has always been concerned with the omnipresence of the distant past. Here, the concerns are modern.

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Voyage of doubt for US Far East fleet

Richard Lloyd Parry
On board the USS Independence, Sea of Japan

The bridge of the *Independence*, the US Navy's oldest and most famous aircraft-carrier, encourages feelings of confidence, and Captain Tom Fellin, the commanding officer, has them in abundance. Every minute, a warplane is catapulted into the air from the ship's flight deck. From the bridge, you can just make out the shapes of smaller vessels, American and Japanese, taking part in Operation Keen Sword, an exercise involving 22,000 personnel.

"I have on this boat five thousand of the toughest Americans you're going to find anywhere," he says. "They operate the ship, they arm the aircraft, they work a 16-hour day non-stop. These guys eat nails for breakfast." Only one question appears to trouble the jovial skipper: why is the *Independence* here in the first place?

Not long ago, the answer would have been obvious. As flagship of the Seventh Fleet, its main role was to deter and repel an attack on Japan or the United States' other Asian friends by the Soviet Union. But that threat has evaporated, and nothing has yet taken its place.

Captain Fellin mentions Taiwan, where the *Independence* sailed in April, as China conducted missile tests in the run-up to Taiwanese elections. He mentions North Korea, suspected of planning its own test missile firing. But the question is tricky. "It's difficult to tell exactly where a contingency might arise in this day and age. The reason we're here is to be ready."

Ready for what? This question has dominated East Asian diplomacy since the Cold War ended. On it depend millions of livelihoods, billions of dollars and the security of the fastest-growing region in the world.

The official answer, on which President Bill Clinton's second-term foreign policy will be based, is in a Defense Department report issued last year. Where US troops once deployed against the Soviet threat, it argues, now they face a different enemy: instability. Like Europe earlier this century, Asia is marked by the rise and fall of great powers.

Regional flash-points, like North Korea and Taiwan, could endanger new markets in Asia. For its own good, as much as those of its allies, the US has responsibility to act as big brother and honest broker, absolving

Japan of the need to defend itself alone and preventing an arms race. "Security is like oxygen," said the author of the Pentagon report, Joseph Nye, an academic. "You tend not to notice it until you begin to lose it."

When it was published, the report did little more than affirm the *status quo*, but it has been challenged by academics and by events in the region.

Among the former are those who argue that in giving Japan a free ride on defence, the US is being taken for a ride of its own, and that security should be a trade-off, with Tokyo opening markets in return for protection.

Others say the US umbrella has contributed to poor relations

- cushioned from reality by the Seventh Fleet. Japan has never had to develop mature relations with China and Korea, and remains diplomatically stunted.

The most significant objections came in September last year, when a 12-year-old girl was

raped by US troops in Okinawa,

a small Japanese island which is home to a third of the 100,000 US troops in East Asia.

Whatever it has done for

the rest of the region, Dr Nye's

security oxygenated Okinawa, a quarter of which is given

to US bases, with their attendant problems. The uproar forced the two governments to come up with a plan to reduce the bases and, for the first time, Japanese diplomats are contemplating a time when US

troops may withdraw from Japan in large numbers.

In the end, all these cogitations come down to another question: what is the future of China? There is little doubt that early next century, it will have

the world's largest economy, matched by an enlarged, modernised military. Dr Nye and his president use the word "engagement" to describe their policy towards Beijing; to their critics, deployment of 100,000

troops and the dispatch of the *Independence* to Taiwan in April looks like a self-fulfilling prophecy. Having seen off one Cold War adversary, they risk, by their presence, contributing to the creation of another.



China in oil talks with Baghdad

Teresa Poole
Peking

Xinhua, Oil firms from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East have also held talks with Baghdad.

China, whose buoyant economy is driving up oil imports, is eager to reach an understanding with Iraq ahead of any revised "oil-for-food" deal, or an eventual dismantling of the broader economic sanctions. Last year China imported 17 million tons of crude oil and this is forecast to rise to more than 40 million tons by the year 2000 and 100 million tons by 2010.

Peking has made no secret of its wish to re-establish trade links with Baghdad if United Nations sanctions are lifted. Iraq could help meet China's growing demand for imported crude.

China was an enthusiastic backer of the "oil-for-food" deal brokered by Iraq and the United Nations in May, which would have allowed Baghdad to sell \$2bn (£1.2bn) of oil over six months to buy food and medicine. That deal floundered when Iraq intervened in fighting between Kurdish factions in August.

The three-sentence-long report published yesterday by Xinhua gave no specific information about the negotiations between the state oil giant China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and Baghdad. But last month the Middle East Economic Survey (MEES) reported that Iraq and China had initialled a production-sharing deal to develop the al-Ahdab oilfield in central Iraq. The survey said it was the first such agreement to be finalised by the Iraqi oil authorities and represented "an important challenge to the UN sanctions regime". It is not clear whether this is the same as the negotiations referred to yesterday by

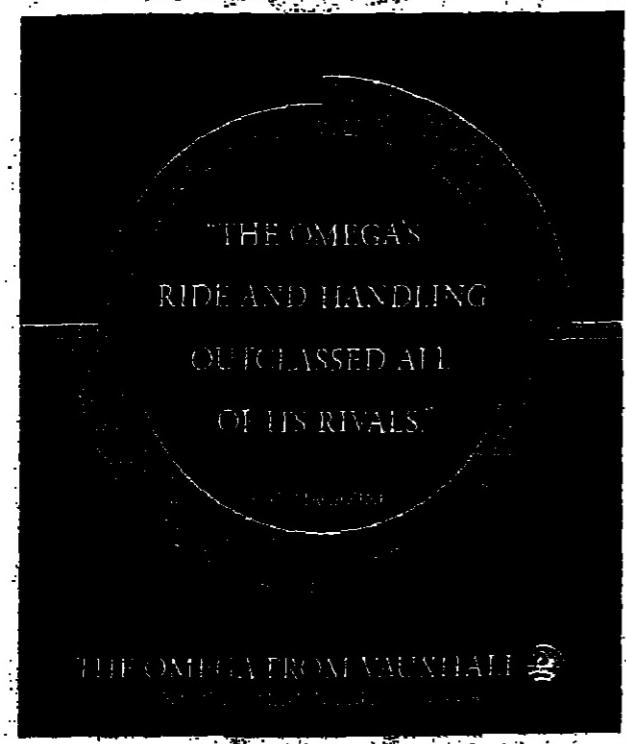
Xinhua. Oil firms from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East have also held talks with Baghdad.

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Zaire's silent capital braces for mob rule

David Orr
Kinshasa

The population of Kinshasa, the Zairean capital, is bracing itself for violent student demonstrations. The students and their political masters have set today as the deadline for the resignation of Kengo wa Dondo, the Prime Minister. Mr wa Dondo, unpopular much for his Tutsi ancestry as for his policies, has become the main focus of discontent after the Zairean army's humiliating defeat by Tutsi rebels in the east.

Yesterday the streets were all but deserted and the shops were closed after student activists declared a *vile mort* (dead town). Youths manning makeshift barriers turned back motorists on the road to the airport while troops looked on.

It is now a week since the students started rampaging through the capital's streets. So far two have been shot dead by the military. Every day hundreds of cars are seized by youths and driven around the city, horns blaring. Shortly after leaving the airport my taxi was hijacked by chanting youths, many of them wearing bandanas around

their heads and brandishing imitation machine-guns.

Stones and bottles flew through the air as young men danced on the bonnet of the car. One took charge of the wheel while others hustled the driver into the back seat. Finding myself, in effect, kidnapped, I opened the door and threw beer to take much notice.

The political order, or what stands for such in the anarchy of Zaire, has collapsed since the Tutsi Banyamulenge rebels and their Rwandan allies routed the army. In the vacuum caused by the continuing absence of President Mobutu Sese Seko, the opposition has been able to exploit the frustration of the populace. The main believed to be behind the protests in the capital is Etienne Tshisekedi, an ousted prime minister and opposition leader. However, his support is limited and regional.

It is widespread dissatisfaction with Mr wa Dondo rather than any forceful leadership on the part of Mr Tshisekedi that has been the main motor behind the demonstrations.

"I'm afraid that the unrest could spill over into rioting and looting," said a diplomat. "When their emotions are pushed over a certain limit, these people can do a lot of damage. The rank-and-file of the military could easily get fed up and provoke looting."

Looting is a commonplace in this country where the military is paid a pittance or not at all. The last outbreaks occurred in 1991 and 1993. Many feel that only the return of President Mobutu, still recuperating in Europe after a cancer operation, can rescue Zaire.

Kisangani, a large town west of the area in which fighting has taken place, is said to have suffered severely from the ill discipline of the war-weary and poorly provisioned soldiers. Other villages are said to have been ransacked and their inhabitants driven out.

"The military is fragmented and dangerously volatile," said one diplomat. "Mobutu is the only one who can control the army. I believe he will come back soon but the longer he stays away the more uncertain things become."

President Mobutu has ap-



Sole provider: A lone shoeshine boy working on a shoe in Kinshasa yesterday, as Zaire fell further into anarchy

Photograph: AP

proved United Nations' proposals for the intervention of a multi-national humanitarian protection force in Zaire. But so far no strategy has been agreed for the deployment of

such a force, deemed essential if adequate aid is to reach more than 1 million civilians and refugees who have been displaced by the fighting. It is now understood that there will be no

British participation in any international operation that might be mounted.

The Zairean government insists that all relief efforts must come through the capital and

not through its eastern region over which it no longer has any control. The International Committee of the Red Cross says its attempts to despatch airborne relief supplies to the dis-

placed have been frustrated by the authorities in Kinshasa. Officials of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees were also blocked from visiting the stricken interior.

Mandela ready to send in troops as the West hangs back

Emerging plans for an international operation to intervene in Zaire were trapped in a vicious circle last night. No Western power – the US, Britain or France – is prepared to intervene without a clear objective and a clear picture of what they are going into, what the opposition may be, and how well-armed they are. But without troops on the ground, they have little prospect of finding out.

In Johannesburg, President Nelson Mandela said yesterday he was prepared to send South African troops to central Africa as part of an international force, though he added that he had not decided how big a unit to commit.

Little is known about the principal warring factions: the mainly

Tutsi rebels within Zaire, known as the Banyamulenge; "people from the Mulenge hills"; the mainly Hutu former Rwandan government troops who have been sheltering in the refugee camps in Zaire, known as the Interhamwe – those who fight together – and the Zairean forces.

The Interhamwe are estimated to be 40,000 strong. There are about 400,000 Banyamulenge people, suggesting they could also field a force of up to 40,000 fighting troops. On the evidence so far, they are relatively well-disciplined. The Banyamulenge control all three airfields in the region: Goma, Bukavu and Kivu,

which would make any attempt by the Zairean government to move troops into the area very difficult.

Africa is awash with arms, though the mainly smaller variety – rifles, machine-guns, hand-held anti-tank weapons and mines. They tend to flow to where the market is best. The Banyamulenge have been lying low for some time and would have acquired arms over many years.

More recent supplies come from four main sources: those they have bought or captured from the ill-disciplined Zairean army; from Rwanda – where some of them number

Army against the Hutus two years ago; from Uganda, where many members of the current Rwandan government were educated and where links exist which would result in a blind eye being turned to arms shipments into north-eastern Zaire; and lastly from Angola. During the Angolan civil war, arms flowed from Zaire's Shaba province into Angola.

More recently, it seems they have started flowing back again via South African and US arms dealers.

Some of the mainly Hutu Interhamwe took part in the genocide against Tutsis two years ago, and have been hiding out in the Zairean

refugee camps. They are now being driven east by the Banyamulenge. They took arms with them when they fled two years ago. There have been rumours that the French had been resupplying them, but the French denied this categorically and it seems unlikely that they would have continued to do so after the genocide of 1994. However, some arms did pass to the Hutu groups through Goma, with the connivance of the Zairean authorities.

Over the past few days, the main western powers have moved from extreme unwillingness to intervene to one where they will consider inter-

vention if they are given a clear job to do. Two possibilities have been discussed: the creation of a safe area around an airport where the refugees could be concentrated, and the creation of corridors to enable refugees to return gradually to Rwanda.

"No one knows the exact situation on the ground, no one knows what the intervention force would do – intervene between whom and whom?" said a senior diplomat in Nairobi.

"You can't go rushing in with troops without knowing what the mission is," said Nicholas Burns, a US State Department spokesman.

The French were to the fore in

proposing intervention, and seemed the most likely to lead the operation, but there are grave reservations because of their history in the area and their former support for the Hutus.

The French Foreign Minister, Hervé de Charette, yesterday tried to calm reports of differences between France and the US over the crisis. "Undoubtedly in the past weeks there were some bitter words exchanged between our two countries and I believe such exchanges were unfortunate," he said. "But there is no conflict of interest between France and the US in Africa". Mr de Charette said France was ready to contribute 1,000 troops to a 5,000-strong multinational force. Spain has also put 1,000 troops on alert.

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Britons injured as Zambia poll sparks student riots

Lusaka (Reuters) — The government yesterday closed Zambia's largest university after riot police moved in to quell political unrest ahead of next week's general election.

Police used teargas and batons to disperse students demonstrating against a ban on a planned march to the presidential residence. They wanted to protest against a poll on 18 November which many opposition parties intend to boycott.

Closure of the campus follows two days of unrest in which 10 students were arrested and several people injured, including a British Airways crew.

"The University of Zambia has been closed because the atmosphere here is not conducive to academic work," the university senate said in a statement.

The announcement came as students armed with stones fought pitched battles with police and barricaded roads leading into the campus. Traffic on a nearby highway was stopped for part of the morning as students pelted motorists before being driven back by teargas and baton charges. The campus was later sealed off.

Student leaders said they wanted President Frederick Chiluba to reopen dialogue with his political opponents and possibly suspend polls until all political parties reached consensus on the rules governing the elections. "Today's riot was caused by police to disrupt a peaceful demonstration by students," a student leader said.

Seven opposition parties, including former president Kenneth Kaunda's United National Independence Party (UNIP), are boycotting the polls, which they say have been arranged to ensure that the ruling Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) remains in power.

The parties are opposed to a

new constitution which bars some candidates, including Mr Kaunda, from contesting the presidential race on the grounds that they are not native-born Zambians. Mr Kaunda was the country's head of state for nearly three decades, leading Zambia to independence and ruling until Mr Chiluba defeated him in polls in 1991.

Opposition parties are also unhappy with the voters' register, which omits 2.3 million of the 4.6 million eligible voters and with the state-owned media's coverage of campaigns which they say favours the ruling party.

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German threat to scupper currency pact

Sarah Holm
Brussels

A growing power battle between Germany and other European countries over who lays down the law for the single currency could prevent agreement in December on a crucial system of budget rules and sanctions.

It had been expected that a long-awaited "stability pact", containing rules for governing the use of the euro, would be signed at the Dublin summit in December.

However, European finance ministers, meeting in Brussels yesterday, failed to decide what those laws should be. The ministers

were also far from deciding what European body should enforce the laws. Jean Arthuis, the French finance minister, has proposed radical plans, supported by Germany, for a new informal "economic government" to be called a "stability council".

The council would operate as a "G7-style club", modelled on the Group of Seven industrial countries, and consisting of only states inside the single currency.

Creation of such an exclusive new political club would have serious implications for Britain, which would be excluded if it "opts out". Yesterday Kenneth Clarke, the

Chancellor, said he was "very sceptical" about the idea of such a "discreet club" which could create new division between those inside economic and monetary union (EMU) and those outside.

The creation of a stability pact and stability council are the single most important building blocks for EMU, and a delay will raise questions about the determination of member states to proceed.

Germany, which first proposed a "stability pact" a year ago, wants the rules for budgetary discipline to be as strict as possible in order to ensure that the euro is as strong as the mark. Without firm evidence that its

partners will keep their spending under control, Helmut Kohl, the German Chancellor, fears he may be unable to sell the single currency to his own public. A senior German official said: "It is vital that our government achieves the results it wants. Without an effective stability pact the German public will not be convinced."

German frustration with the laxity of rules currently being proposed has pushed Bonn to threaten to opt out of the current negotiations altogether, by seeking tougher deals with only those countries who qualify to join at a later date. Such deals would be done outside the terms of

the Maastricht Treaty. Germany has underlined its threat by saying it has legal advice that it has the power to go it alone, should other member states not toe its line.

However, most other EU member states, including Britain, hope that Bonn's hard line is a bargaining threat. Germany's stance would place them in an unacceptable economic straight-jacket, they say.

Under the complex system of rules for the stability pact now on the table each country inside EMU must accept a sliding scale of fines if it allows its budget deficit to rise above 3 per cent of gross domestic product. Exemptions can be made

for countries in "exceptional circumstances" - for example, if they have suffered a natural disaster. Exemptions can also be made in cases of a severe economic downturn. Germany's prime demand is that the "severe economic downturn" be defined far more tightly than the Commission or its partners can accept.

Germany is also demanding stricter rules for enforcement of fines against countries which let their budget deficits slip out of line.

As other member states focused on German demands yesterday, Mr Clarke, found himself obliged to justify to Euro-sceptics back home his repeated support for a stability

pact. Critics say the pact would force Britain, should it sign up, to an unprecedented transfer of sovereign powers. Public spending and tax would in future be scrutinised by Brussels and the government would be fined if it stepped out of line.

However, Mr Clarke yesterday countered that the stability pact can only be good for Britain as it aims to ensure sound economic management, which is already part of government policy.

The pact would help keep Euro interest rates down, and this could only be good for Britain whether it is "in" or "out" of the single currency, said the Chancellor.

EU auditors expose 'dodgy' £3bn payouts

Katherine Butler
Brussels

The EU's spending watchdog will today slam European governments for mishandling at least £3bn in taxpayers' money last year. For the second year running, the European Court of Auditors will announce that it cannot certify the legality and regularity of EU payments - totalling £55bn - because it has found so many discrepancies.

The court estimates that almost 6 per cent of all payments from the 1995 budget were subject to "substantial and serious" error.

The court's audit revealed that the transactions underlying the payments for the financial year contained too many errors for the court to be able to provide global positive assurance as to the legality and regularity of the transactions concerned", it concludes.

Fraud is involved. But the auditors also blame a mix of waste, mismanagement and sloppy controls or lax application of the rules by member states, particularly in the two biggest spending areas: regional or social grants and agriculture, which together account for 75 per cent of payments.

"What we are saying is that payments of the order of £3bn were dodgy. We are decidedly unhappy about the handling of those sums. If the auditor of a private company entered this

reservation in the annual accounts, there would be uproar among the shareholders," one senior court official said yesterday.

The harsh judgment appears to give British critics a further stick with which to beat the Brussels bureaucracy. But the report is more an indictment of national administrations.

The auditors found that 90 per cent of the errors relating to payments were in member

If these were the accounts of a private company there would be uproar among shareholders'

states, not in Brussels. Frequently, it was at the level of local or regional organisations who were found to be dishing out cash to schemes which were ineligible for funding.

Farmers were given money for setting aside non-existent fields or for owning herds of non-existent cows or sheep. Even £3m from a fund to help governments combat farm fraud went missing because of lax controls, the auditors say.

Denmark paid out £12m in

EU subsidies to exporters of cheese to Iran who were not entitled to claim it. The notorious olive oil regime which benefits Italy, Spain, Greece, France and Portugal is once again cited for its total absence of reliable controls.

The auditors are scathing about the operation of the EU's vast social fund which has disbursed £22bn since 1993; it requires an urgent overhaul, the auditors say.

In Greece, a state body received subsidies for a retraining scheme for the unemployed. The money was spent on training civil servants who could not legally be dismissed.

Regional funding also fell victim to a number of scams: a natural tourism scheme in Spain involved the spending of £200,000 on the renovation of a building. The auditors discovered that the building was in fact a weekend retreat for someone who was not even a local resident.

Another scheme in Spain involved the fitting out of a building for the breeding of partridges and rabbits to develop hunting in the area. The investigators found that £30,000 had been spent on refurbishing apartments for people running the project.

The Court of Auditors is obliged to deliver a "statement of assurance" on the annual accounts under new rules written into the Maastricht Treaty.

Muslims' return to their village triggers gunfight



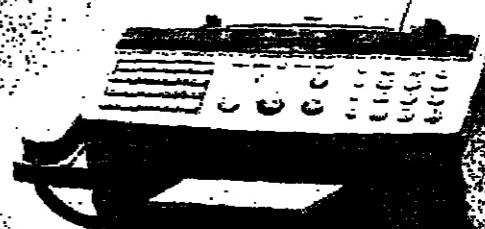
Bosnian Muslim women walking after their attempt to return home to the Serb-held village of Gajevi, near Tuzla, ended with Serb and Muslim led government forces trading gunfire. West of Tuzla, near Kijic, government experts have unearthed 244 corpses from one of Bosnia's

biggest mass graves. The bodies of Muslim civilians killed by rebel Serbs were found in a cave last month. Photograph: Almir Amara/Reuters

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George's easy credit drives French government crazy

Mary Dejevsky
Paris

France's first branch of Crazy George's, the British-owned furniture and domestic appliance chain, has had to close after only two days of trading amid a storm of political criticism over its sales methods. The store, which targets customers on low incomes and offers easy but expensive credit, opened last

Saturday in Bobigny, a poor suburb to the east of Paris.

After a swoop by trading standards officers last Sunday, the Economy Ministry announced that the store would close for an indefinite period. The ministry made it clear that the store had not been barred from trading "morely advised" to improve the labelling of its prices.

A spokesman for the store said it would alter the labels to

comply with all official requirements. The particular complaint was that the small weekly repayment sum appeared on the label in big figures, with the retail price in smaller figures and the total credit cost, which could be twice or three times the retail price, even smaller underneath.

Crazy George's specialises in giving credit on household goods to people who might

otherwise be unable to afford them, including those on low pay or benefit. It offers a form of hire purchase, under which the customer makes small weekly or monthly repayments over a protracted period. The purchase remains the property of the company for the duration of the loan and may be returned (by the customer), or taken back (by the store) for default.

The difficulty, seized on by

French politicians across the political spectrum, is that the repayment schedule may make the goods two or even three times more expensive than if bought outright. Examples included a washing machine for Fr46 a week (£5.50), retail price Fr3,170 (£377), credit price Fr7,176 (£854).

In Britain, where there are already more than 50 such stores and hire purchase is common,

this passed almost unremarked. In France, however, where medium-term credit is less common and less respectable, the terms at Crazy George's were deemed as socially unjust and immoral.

Just how much of an issue the store had become can be gauged from the standing of its critics. The leader of the Socialist Party, Lionel Jospin, spoke of the "scandal of shops for the poor

where they have to pay twice

what the rich pay". The right-of-centre Economy Minister, Jean Arthuis, said it "passed the bounds of decency". A Gaullist minister, Eric Raoult, said it would marginalise the poor into particular shops and make their poverty permanent.

Trading standards officials

have stressed that hire pur-

chase as practised by Crazy George's is not illegal in France, nor is the interest rate, at around

40 per cent, and the store should be able to reopen when its debts are considered satisfactory. But a clearer statement of the discrepancy between the price of a fridge bought over three years and one bought outright is unlikely to deter those who need a fridge now and for whom this is the credit available. The management describes customers' response in the first two days as "very favourable".

German austerity threatens fighter jet

Imre Karacs
Bonn

German penury is endangering Europe's largest joint arms project - the construction of a new generation of multi-purpose combat aircraft in Britain, Germany, Italy and Spain.

It was revealed yesterday that the Bonn Defence Ministry, which has just lost DM200m (£80.6m) from its budget, has no funds set aside for placing a firm order for the aircraft next year, when preparations for production are to begin. Britain and Spain are already committed to Eurofighter, but Germany has yet to confirm that it wants to buy 180 of the single-seat twin-engine jets.

Finances are tight, a Defence Ministry spokesman said yesterday. "We have no room for manoeuvre." Asked about the medium-term outlook, he stated: "We must wait and see".

Alarmed by the prospect of a German about-turn, Britain's Prime Minister, John Major, last week wrote to Chancellor Helmut Kohl pleading for his support. But as Bonn slashes back its expenditure in an effort to qualify for monetary union, the other great European project is sliding down the list of priorities.

An assurance by the Finance Minister, Theo Waigel, that Eurofighter would be funded was dismissed by the budgetary expert of one of the governing parties as an "April fool's joke".

Eurofighter was to replace the 40-year-old Phantom jets which saw Germany through the Cold War. With no obvious enemy in sight, however, even some members of the government are wavering in their fondness for what the opposi-

tion Social Democrats call an "expensive luxury".

Germany has invested DM6.5bn in research, and 40,000 jobs are estimated to depend on the project, mainly at Dasa, the aeronautics division of Daimler-Benz. According to the financial daily *Handelsblatt*, Dasa dropped its price last week from DM26bn to 23.3bn, but still came away empty handed.

The company also wanted the government to guarantee DM6.5bn leading up to the start of production in 2001, but again to no avail. Dasa, with a 30 per cent stake in the project, is the second largest contractor, after British Aerospace which holds 37.5 per cent. Altogether, 620 jets are to be built for the four nations.

At a time when even unemployment benefits are being cut, it is hard for the government to justify buying the aircraft. The Defence Ministry, the department hardest hit by this year's austerity budget, has more immediate problems.

Tanks lie idle because there is no money for repairs, and the planes are being scraped together for the Bundeswehr's first mission abroad - to Bosnia.

Germany is to decide later this month whether it can bankroll the project. Britain and the other partners are bracing themselves for the worst.

"I am sure Eurofighter is not heading for the rocks," Britain's Secretary of State for Defence, Michael Portillo, insisted yesterday, while conceding that delay was possible. "We would greatly regret a delay to Eurofighter, which would be damaging but not fatal," he said.

Which is what the Germans have been saying all along.

Swans enjoy a short winter cruise



Olaf Niess, the Swan Father of Hamburg, with swans on Alster lake in the city. He and his helpers round them up each year to take them to winter quarters, and they are brought back in spring

Photograph: Michael Probst / AP

significant shorts

Russians say US breached spy etiquette

Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service said the US broke "unwritten rules" by giving an ex-spy a visa and arresting him when he arrived in America. It also offered to bail Vladimir Galkin, accused by the FBI of spying on the Star Wars defence system when he was a KGB agent. The Russians say Mr Galkin, arrested in New York last month, was entrapped, since the US knew of his espionage background when he was given a visa. AP - Moscow

Jews converge on Hebron

Jews protesting at a planned troop redeployment flocked to Hebron after a phone call by Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister, to Yasser Arafat failed to break the deadlock in talks on its future. Ultra-Orthodox Jews marched to the tomb of the Patriarchs, sacred to Muslims and Jews. A seminarian said: "The people feel that this may be the last time they can visit Hebron." AP - Haifa

Neolithic treasure bust

Two Greeks were arrested after being found with a 5,000-year-old collection of 31 unique Neolithic clay statuettes in their car. Police said they detained the two men during a highway patrol check along the country's main north-south highway. Archaeologists said 20 of the clay female figurines were intact and all are believed to have been stolen from dig sites in the Achaea region of the Peloponnese. AP - Athens

'Chatterley' to bare all in Japan

Japan, a nation where pornography is freely available, gets a chance later this month to read an uncensored version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* for the first time in 45 years. The Shinchosha publishing house said that a full Japanese translation of Lawrence's classic, including passages still officially banned, would be available on bookshelves on 30 November. In 1950 the Japanese Supreme Court found a complete Japanese translation of the author's book obscene and ordered about 80 pages of love scenes to be deleted. Reuter - Tokyo

Pope ready to receive Castro

The Pope will receive Cuba's President Castro if he asks to meet during his visit to Rome this week for a UN food summit, the Vatican said. It would be their first meeting and could lead to a papal trip to Cuba. AP - Rome

Hell's Angels on murder charge

Björn Dyrberg, for the prosecution, said the six men "plotted and conspired homicide". The killer of Mr Larsen has not been identified yet and the prosecution will try to convince the 12-man jury that the bikers should be sentenced as a group, not as individuals. If found guilty, the six face up to life in prison.

Sixty-nine people are scheduled to take the stand, including a non-biker considered the key witness. The witness tried to avoid making a court appearance because he was scared by threats from the Hell's Angels, but the Supreme Court ruled in September that he must testify.



An armed policeman outside the high court yesterday. Photograph: AP

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on place at or near the bikers' rural clubhouses. But in the past eight months, attacks have increasingly burst out in heavily populated areas, raising fears that bystanders would be caught in the violence.

Those attacks have included a shooting outside the main post office in downtown Oslo and the anti-tank grenade attack last month on the Hell's Angels Copenhagen headquarters, in which two people were killed and 17 injured. At least nine people have died and 46 have been wounded in the three-year feud.

The murder trial is being held amid intense security. The six defendants were led into the Eastern High Court

by police carrying sub-machine guns and wearing bullet-proof jackets. No one with a criminal record was allowed into the courtroom and spectators, journalists and other observers were body-searched before entry.

The defendants, who cannot be named under a court order, had not seen each other since their arrests. They gave each other the characteristic bikers' hug as they met up in the courtroom. "You look great," one biker told another.

Heavily armed police officers surrounded the down-town court building while marksmen were spotted on nearby roofs. One street alongside the court was closed and parking around

the courthouse will be forbidden because of fear of car bombs.

Björn Dyrberg, for the prosecution, said the six men "plotted and conspired homicide". The killer of Mr Larsen has not been identified yet and the prosecution will try to convince the 12-man jury that the bikers should be sentenced as a group, not as individuals. If found guilty, the six face up to life in prison.

Sixty-nine people are scheduled to take the stand, including a non-biker considered the key witness. The witness tried to avoid making a court appearance because he was scared by threats from the Hell's Angels, but the Supreme Court ruled in September that he must testify.

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Can't we leave schools to the local councils?

The Funding Agency for Schools is ready to launch a takeover bid – not for the world, but for the nation's schools, which is a good start. Gone would be any discretion for the much-maligned local education authorities. Forget local politicians interfering in school financial affairs. Head teachers would instead receive their money from on high. Local authorities would have little left to do. And if the Agency had its way, the cash would be allocated by a neat national funding formula with no account taken of local preferences. Citing the mess local management has made of some schools, and the variation in education funding across the country, supporters of a nationalised funding system can claim to be proposing a fairer and more rational approach all round.

But what would happen to local oversight of an inherently local service? Again, supporters of the funding agency approach would argue that roughly 90 per cent of the funding of schools is not at the local council's discretion anyway – it is entirely at the disposal of the governing body, and the head as the governors' chief executive. Parents, it is argued, can express their views direct to governors, many of whom also have children at the school. Local councils, by contrast, are not always responsive to angry parents, even when they threaten to vote them out.

But the fact is that local councillors, however unresponsive, are nearer to home than a national funding agency. If the local authority screws up or gets its priorities wrong, local voters know who to blame and who to complain to. And politicians, anxious about their vote at the next council election, have at least an incentive to listen. Anonymous national bureaucrats, tucked away in an office in London, have no reason to listen to parents at all – if parents can even work out who and where they are.

Gone, too, would be the scope for local prioritising. People who want to invest heavily in nursery education at the expense (for example) of local leisure facilities, will be denied that choice. At the moment some £700m is allocated by local education authorities to schools over and above the minimum prescribed by government, because people in certain areas decide that that is how they want their money spent.

It is not only democracy that is at stake here. There is no necessary trade-off between local democracy and efficiency. Quite the reverse. A single funding formula for schools, which takes no account of local variations and peculiarities, will not work. In some regions, for example, the schools on the top of the hills may need more cash than those at the bottom – for heating and transport. How would national for-

mulae account for that?

A fair and efficient allocation of cash between schools will require an awful lot of local knowledge, not a simple national formula. To do it properly the national agency would have to leave its London sanctuary and move out into the communities that its decisions affect. In other words, it would have to replicate the functions that local councils perform, only in a much less accountable way.

Nor can decisions about funding be separated from thorny questions about welfare. Placing a difficult child who has been excluded from several schools

already will have implications for resources. So, too, will rescuing a failing school. These functions would require pooled local resources, under the auspices of one or another agency – when we already have local councils to carry out these roles.

Worst of all, depriving local authorities of the freedom to fund denies them the option of developing new initiatives. If we are to accelerate educational achievement, we need to inspire the whole community to take part.

Of course, we should not kid ourselves that local education authorities are best provided by a local authority whose staff understand the people and

the area. National government should set standards targets through tests. It should prescribe a core curriculum. It should ensure that the quality of trained teachers is satisfactory. And then it should leave local people to deliver in the way they see fit, intervening only if things go seriously wrong. Local democracy and local administration need reform and revival; if they are trampled into the dirt, we will all regret the loss.

Consider, too, the mess that certain local authorities have made of the schools in their area. Calderdale local education authority failed to stop the complete collapse of discipline and morale in the Ridings school in Halifax. Meanwhile petty personality politics on Hackney Council left the children at Hackney Downs school in limbo while different factions bickered about whether to close it or not.

Nevertheless, bad management and bad decisions are not the prerogative of local institutions. National government is equally capable of making horrendous mistakes. At least if power is devolved to a local, democratic level, it is more accountable, and can tap into local experience too.

All this means that the true devolution of power is to schools and parents. But some matters – some aspects of the distribution of the cash, but also occasional emergency intervention – are best provided by a local authority whose staff understand the people and



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A lesson for the golden boy

Golden-haired golden boy David Willetts got his wrist smacked yesterday for a memo proposing that the cash-for-questions inquiry be delayed by the Tory MPs to the members' interests committee. Tut, tut, Mr Willetts: manipulating parliamentary standards for party political gain isn't really on. His excuse? According to Tory MPs, the man is a little bear of exceeding large brain, who has little experience of such earthly matters, so we should forgive him his transgression. Hardly. Mr Willetts has learnt the hard way that, in politics at least, you are not supposed to commit all your splendid thoughts to paper. Otherwise your egg-head ends up with egg on its face.

Tag of honour for tearaways

Sir: Your report on the Government's plans to extend electronic monitoring to juvenile offenders ("Electronic tags for children", 9 November) looks like another penal policy fiasco in the making.

Following the failure of experiments in their use with adult offenders, what possible grounds are there for applying these gizmos to those you term "teenage tearaways who vandalise and terrify communities"? If anything, the tag will become a badge of honour.

It is true that in Sweden – the only other European country to have imported the technology from America – tagging has encountered far fewer problems than has been the case in Britain. This is principally because the Swedes regard the tag as a back-up to social work intervention, not as the be-all and end-all.

STEPHEN SHAW
Director
Prison Reform Trust
London EC1

Sir: The Government's plan to place young offenders under electronic monitoring is one of the worst ideas yet to tackle youth crime. Tagging is a negative and stigmatising measure which is particularly unsuitable for juveniles.

These young people will have to attend school with a tag attached to their wrist or ankle branding them as an offender. Some children will undoubtedly boast about their tag and adopt a "hard" image to live up to it. This is exactly the opposite of the attitudes towards which we are trying to steer juvenile offenders.

The resources should be devoted to strengthening constructive options such as bail support programmes and intensive supervision schemes.

PAUL CAVADINO
Chair, Penal Affairs Consortium
London SW9

Life, the Universe and clever newts

Sir: I am not surprised to see your news that the number 42 is key to understanding the universe (5 November). That finally explains why the world is at sixes and sevens and every problem is multiplying.

TOM TICKELL
London, NJ9

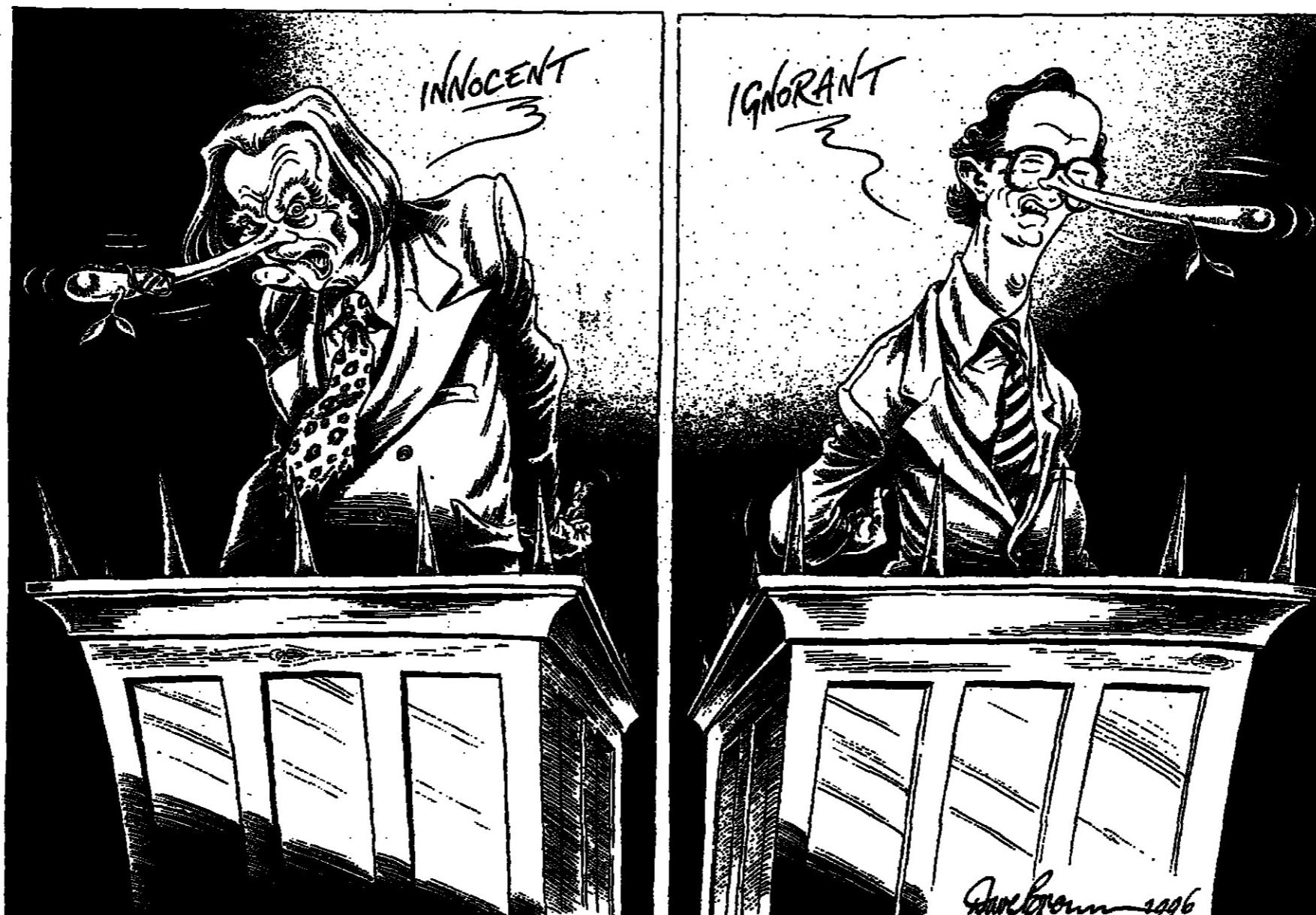
Sir: As for any other physical constant, the value of the Hubble constant depends on the units in which it is measured and astronomers, for convenience, use kilometres per second per megaparsec. That is not a standard unit and it even contains an anthropomorphic element in that a parsec refers to the size of the earth's orbit around the sun.

Therefore, to marvel at the significance of the number 42 for the value of the Hubble constant is nothing but numerology.

DR WERNER WEIGLHOFER
Department of Mathematics
University of Glasgow

Sir: The answer to "Why is the answer to Life, the Universe, and Everything the number 42?" is to be found in the old classic *War with the Newts*, by the Czech writer Karl Capek. The first calculation carried out by an intelligent newt is – surprise, surprise – $6 \times 7 = 42$.

BRUCE JACKSON
Preston,
Lancashire



UK is sweatshop of Europe

Sir: The European Commission's Cohesion Report painted a devastating picture of the UK's economy ("EU says Britons fall into poverty faster", 7 November). The report's poverty figures are already out of date.

More recent figures, newly available to the Commission, indicate that as many as 25 per cent of British households live under the poverty line, lifting the UK to equal first in the EU poverty league alongside Portugal.

However, your report failed to highlight the fact that while UK growth has been employment-intensive, other countries have had a faster growth rate. In the UK today workers work longer hours for lower pay and they do less productively than their European counterparts – a further indication that the UK is the sweatshop of Europe.

The Conservative government's privatisation programme and its insistence on pushing forward its deregulation agenda at every turn has increased the disparities between both regions and social groups.

The report confirms what many of us have known for some time – that social cohesion is breaking down in the UK – and cites the UK as an example of a dual economy. It singles out several of the UK's old industrial regions as examples of zero or negative employment growth – namely the West Midlands, Merseyside and South Yorkshire.

Labour's proposals for a decentralised regional policy will at

last start to close the gaps and use EU funding more effectively to build economic and social cohesion both within and between regions of the UK.

ARLENE McCARTHY MEP
(Peek District, Lab)
Glossop, Derbyshire

Yard denies issue of Stagg photo

Sir: Your article "Deeply suspect" (November 5), is misleading.

At no stage did Scotland Yard issue a photograph of Colin Stagg.

It is not the police who determine "cause of death". It is the pathologist acting for the coroner following a post-mortem examination. In the case of Wayne Douglas, the findings were that he died of a heart condition.

At no time following the shooting of IRA terrorist Dairmid O'Neill did we imply that there had been a "shoot-out". In fact, we cautioned the media against using such terms and our own early statement said "shots fired during the morning's operation were fired by police".

Your own journalists make full use of our expensive, over-stretched 24-hour press bureau service, and I find it extraordinary that you are so critical of it. My press officers would certainly welcome fewer calls.

SARAH CULLUM
Director of Public Affairs
Metropolitan Police
London SW1

Sir: It is unacceptable for Paul Donovan ("Deeply Suspect", 5 November) to claim that BBC's *Crimewatch UK* can "perpetrate injustice" on the strength of the subjective opinion of a fellow journalist.

Crimewatch UK goes to great lengths to ensure accuracy when reproducing known events for its reconstructions. All information phoned in to the programme, of whatever status, is passed on to the relevant police investigation team, and is then carefully sifted before any action is taken.

SEETHA KUMAR
Series producer, "Crimewatch UK"
BBC
London W12

Offshore future for wind turbines

Sir: Your article of 6 November relates how Churchill planned to buoy up battleships with air bags to get them into the Baltic. Churchill was recycling the "Baltic Project" inherited from the previous war.

Admiral Fisher, first Sea Lord up to 1915, when Churchill was First Lord of the Admiralty, dreamed up special heavy ships with shallow draught to get into the Baltic to intercept shipping, seize islands and attack Germany's northern coast. His ideas, unlike Churchill's, actually became hardware, though it was not used for its original purpose.

In independent surveys over the past five years, the public consistently comes out in favour of wind power, with an average support rate of 70-85 per cent. Where surveys have been carried

out before and after a wind farm has been built, local community support for the scheme often increases.

Mr Etherington and myself agree on one thing – that a thorough energy efficiency programme could dramatically cut CO₂ emissions. But energy efficiency is only one side of the equation. We still need to find non-polluting ways to generate electricity in the first place.

TRICIA ALLEN
Friends of the Earth
London N1

Fisher's plan to breach the Baltic

Sir: Your article of 6 November relates how Churchill planned to buoy up battleships with air bags to get them into the Baltic. Churchill was recycling the "Baltic Project" inherited from the previous war.

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I worked for a month in Montreal in September 1951. One of the best-sellers that autumn, prominently displayed in every francophone bookshop, was entitled *Pékin avant razion* – and it had nothing to do with his achievements in World War I.

Lord MONSON
House of Lords
London SW1

Vichy in Quebec

Sir: Commenting on the Roux affair (7 November), you write that during the Second World War II "some members of Quebec's francophone majority initially (my italics) were more sympathetic to the collaborationist Vichy regime in France than to the Allies".

I worked for a month in Montreal in September 1951. One of the best-sellers that autumn, prominently displayed in every francophone bookshop, was entitled *Pékin avant razion* – and it had nothing to do with his achievements in World War I.

Lord MONSON
House of Lords
London SW1

analysis

Britain is feeling good again...

Champagne sales are bubbling, house prices are rising, all's right with the Chancellor's world. But will he reap the rewards, asks Diane Coyle

Nobody wants to describe what is happening to the economy as a boom. As we know too well, boom leads to bust, and neither the Government nor businesses want the next recession to cast its shadow before the last one has faded from memory. They would argue that Britain has gone beyond the ups and downs of the economic cycle to the promised land of steady, sustainable growth.

The champagne sales are well up. House price increases in some parts of the country have reached double digits. Multi-media computers, the late Nineties equivalent of the mobile phone, are walking off the shelves. Sales of women's designer clothes are surging – even in Leeds, thanks to Harvey Nichols. But so far, this is just an encouraging recovery.

The economic news could scarcely be better for the Conservatives. Consumer confidence, the all-important indicator of how voters are feeling about the Government's handling of the economy, is at its highest level since 1988. Just as important, the housing market has recovered and is releasing hundreds of thousands of home owners from negative equity.

Only six months ago Kenneth Clarke's predictions of a recovery in the second half of the year looked like a figment of his cheery imagination. Then tax cuts coming into effect in April delivered the biggest one-off boost to spending power since Nigel Lawson's Budget in the pre-election year of 1986. Although the pundits described it at the time as a modest give-away, the Clarke tax cuts of £3bn were bigger, adjusted for inflation, than the Lawson ones.

Combined with a series of reductions in interest rates starting last December that have taken the cost of a mortgage to the lowest level for nearly 30 years, the Chancellor successfully kick-started the recovery. At the same time, falling unemployment has taken earnings growth up from

3 per cent a year ago to 4 per cent now. Thanks to lower taxes, lower mortgage payments and increased earnings during the past 12 months, a dual-income couple on average earnings with a typical mortgage now has about £300 a month in extra spending power.

The housing market is where the effects have been most dramatic. House prices were flat until the spring but in the space of six months house price inflation has climbed above 7 per cent. Sales of goods related to housing – furniture, carpets, DIY materials, consumer electronics – have risen substantially.

Higher spending power is spreading beyond these homely goods, however. Some of the classic signs of late-1980s froth have returned to the economy. For example, monthly shipments of champagne have climbed above 10 million bottles, a 22 per cent increase on a year earlier. Sales of antiques at the Peter Jones store in Sloane Square have been "very substantial". Spending on eating out is growing at a rate of 30 per cent a year.

Retail specialist Meg Abdy at the Henley Centre says there is general evidence of stronger sales of luxury goods. "The 'sod-it' factor is creeping in. People are a bit more flush with cash and can't keep up the austerity any longer," she argues. Barry Turnbull, city centre manager for Newcastle agrees. "There are no bad weeks at the moment. People are spending freely," he says.

It is hard to see any reason why this momentum should evaporate, despite the straw in the wind of a quarter point rise in base rates a fortnight ago. Pay rises are accelerating as the number of jobless continues to fall – the official total is likely to get below 2 million by the end of the year. Competition between lenders will keep mortgage costs low for some time.

More significant will be the free shares given away by building societies joining the stock-market in 1997. The value of the handout is put at £20m. Even if

the recipients spend only a fifth of their windfall, it will increase consumer spending by 1 per cent, enough to take the economy beyond sustainable growth.

Yet many retailers are keen to stress that we are not revisiting the errors of the 1980s. According to Andrew Higgins, chairman of the British Retail Consortium's economic affairs committee and finance director of the Burton Group, reports of a boom are irresponsible. "Obviously, you cannot say it will never creep back, but the Chancellor has already raised interest rates to counter a mythical danger," he says.

The same fear, of another increase in borrowing costs that would force them to raise mortgage rates, is making the building societies talk down the danger of an unsustainable housing boom, even though some economists predict house price inflation above 10 per cent next year.

This is a wonderful dilemma for Mr Clarke. Either there is a steady recovery which requires him to do precisely nothing to deliver strong growth in consumer spending between now and May. Or there is a boom, and he can nudge up interest rates to look cautious while reaping any electoral benefits of the feel-good factor. Many experts do not think we will see a re-run of the late 1980s. David Miles, professor of economics at Imperial College, London, says one reason is that further tax cuts are off the agenda, both before and after the election. "We are looking at much more deep-seated fiscal problems than anyone perceived a decade ago," he says.

Others remain sceptical about both the Government's management of the economy and the credit they will get for it. According to Professor Charles Bean of the London School of Economics: "It is difficult to mismanage an upturn from a deep recession, and my hunch is the electorate will think the economy has turned out well despite the Government. The real proof will be how well they manage the boom."



Consumer confidence: shoppers in Gateshead yesterday

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at

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Right answers to the wrong questions



Today I have great pleasure in handing over our regular advice column to the well-known New Age philosopher, Jeremy Hurspierpoint Jones, who knows more about the mysteries of the world than I shall ever do. All yours, Jeremy!

I am intrigued by the way in which people now write to the newspapers for answers to questions. The great example of this is the feature in "The Guardian" called Odds and Sods, or Notes and Queries, or something like that, where one reader writes in to ask

"Why are motorways marked in blue on maps and not some other colour?" and another reader writes in with the solution, or as is typically the case with "Guardian" readers, lots of people write in with lots of different solutions, none of which is the right one. Why do readers do this? What makes them think that the newspapers will know the answer, especially as newspapers never get anything else quite right?

New Age philosopher Jeremy Hurspierpoint Jones writes: There is nothing new about this. People have always written into newspapers with queries. In the old days "The Daily Mirror" had a page run by the Old Codgers which answered extremely factual questions such as "Is it true that Vera Lynn was so precious to the war effort that she was never sent to the front but had several doubles who went abroad and sang instead of her to the troops?" It is only the nature of the questions which has changed. All nature is composed of questions and answers, which ebb and flow in a

mystical way through our consciousness. All unhappiness comes from asking the wrong questions. You see, when Hitler asked the question, "Wouldn't it be fun to invade France, so that we can all get into the Louvre without paying?", it was not a good question to ask. However...

Next question, please – Ed Why do some insects such as bees and wasps often hover so close to people when they must know they are courting danger? Do they actually feel drawn to human company?

Jeremy Hurspierpoint Jones writes: Yes. If you remember the principles of reincarnation, it stands to reason that many such insects are in fact people reborn as wasps or gnats, and by hovering close to you are saying an altruistic "Hello there!" It may also be that they do not enjoy their new existence as wasps or bees and are hoping to be swatted dead by you, thus giving them the entree to a new existence.

Why are so many places in Britain situated on the edges of maps? Jeremy H Jones writes:

Some people do believe that there is a series of mystical lines radiating throughout the ancient British world, passing through a series of places which never appear in the middle of any map, only on the edge. Bradford-on-Avon is a good example, depending on which map you use. The thing about these places is that as they are on the edge of one map, they are also on the edge of the next map. And if the place is in the corner of a map, it is also on the corner of three other maps. And this raises the question, if a place is on the edge of three other maps, might it not be also on the edge of ANOTHER map that we don't know about? In another geographical world?

What does that mean?

J H Jones writes: How do you mean, "mean"? What are your feelings about wind farms?

J Jones writes: I think they are a capitalist plot to steal the soul from our winds. To help combat this, I am currently building a wind chime farm on my fields which will do nothing but

tinkle unprofitably and thus restore the missing energy to the air.

Well, why ARE motorways marked in blue on maps and not some other colour?

Jones writes: You are, like Hitler, asking the wrong questions. If you open your eyes and look at road maps from mainland Europe, you will see that motorways are generally marked with a double red and yellow line. It is only in Britain we colour motorways blue. And that is because we do not have any big rivers.

Fardon? J writes: If motorways were coloured blue on continental maps, they would be hard to distinguish from such big rivers as the Seine, Rhône and Rhine. We have much smaller – and more wriggly – rivers, hard to confuse on a map with a motorway, which is why nobody ever tries to drive down the Severn.

Would YOU like some alternative answers to your straight questions? Drop a line to Jeremy Hurspierpoint Jones, or just beam it along by Thinkmail.

...but what about the politicians?

Labour is in a dilemma: how do they accept the boom without praising the Tories? Donald Macintyre has some advice

John Major could scarcely have delivered a more upbeat message to the City in his Guildhall speech last night: 1997 would see the "most secure economic base for generations ... Britain was 'back in the first rank'". There was a clear sub-text here: the feel-good factor is back, and with it the prospects of a Tory victory next year. What's more, a lot of the hard figures back up his optimism. So how worried should Labour be that its commanding lead is about to slip away?

On one analysis, not much. The polls show an unprecedented disjunction between economic optimism among the electorate and its willingness to vote Tory.

In the past, as economic prospects improved, people became more supportive of the government. That relationship has broken down. Last month's MORI poll for *The Times* showed that the so-called economic optimism index had fallen from 10 per cent to only 1 per cent since the first half of the year. Yet the same poll still gave Labour an awe-inspiring 28-point lead.

This has been worrying the Tories for months, and is usually attributed to the fast-moving blow to Tory credibility suffered when Major was ignominiously forced out of ERM in 1992. But it may also simply be that, having repeatedly told the voters that the recession was caused by international factors entirely beyond their control, ministers are now having a hard time persuading the same public that the recovery, by contrast, is all because of the brilliance of the Government.

Second, Labour is much less vulnerable to the charge that it would ruin an economic recovery through high taxes than it was before the 1992 election. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown have been zealous in shedding Labour's lax-and-spend baggage. And as part of its softening-up process for the Budget, Labour will this week start reminding the voters again how far taxes have gone up, before Clarke starts to bring them down again.

Finally, there is a heretical but, to some, seductive argument that electors are more likely to vote Labour in an economic recovery than in a recession. In the Labour post-mortem examination after its 1992 defeat, some of the then Shadow Chancellor John Smith's aides argued that voters are more comfortable voting for redistribution when the country can afford it. This was rejected by Brown and Blair – and by John Smith, when he became Labour leader – as a distraction from what they, by contrast, saw as the central lesson of the 1992 defeat: the part played in it by Labour's tax and spending commitments.

Labour need not panic over the prospects of a steadily improving economy

between now and polling day. But that doesn't mean that it can be complacent, either. First, it can't be quite sure that the ERM débâcle is the only reason the Tories aren't reaping the benefit of economic optimism. It may be, as Michael Dicks of Leamann Brothers argued last month, that much to do with negative equity. You can't reverse the 1992 devaluation. But a housing mini-boom could unlock negative equity, and with it some more Tory votes.

Labour also knows that the markets will allow the Tories somewhat more fiscal "irresponsibility" than they would a Labour government. This poses a dilemma for Labour: Blair and Brown are genuinely sceptical about how real are the spending cuts Clarke will announce; they have already spent a lot of time pointing out that public borrowing has doubled since John Major came to power; they worry that privatisation receipts – for example of housing association debt or MOD homes – are one-offs for which the next government will have to pay a price.

But criticising the Government for conducting an irresponsible "scorched earth" policy can be dangerous, and not only because it sounds Eeyore-ish, just when everyone is feeling better. For what are they supposed to say they would do instead? Produce deeper cuts in spending? Hardly an electoral rallying cry. Raise more taxes? Unthinkable for new Labour. What's more, the more they attack the Government for mismanaging the economy now, the more they may be building up trouble for themselves if they win. As Harold Wilson found in 1964, the worse you say things are before an election, the more the markets expect you take drastic and unpalatable action when you get in.

So Labour has to play it cool. Ideally, perhaps, Labour would prefer an election now, before the feel-good factor has any more chance to play into the polls. But that isn't going to happen. Labour will not get drawn into playing alternative budgets with Ken Clarke. It will continue to attack the Tories for Britain's long-term failure to invest. And it will continue to implement Tony Blair's latest exhortation to his colleagues: the "three Rs" are reminding voters of the pain they have suffered under the Tories in the past: reassuring them that Labour is not going back to its old ways (as Brown did his best to do yesterday on inflation); and rewarding them with the promise of a better quality of life.

It may be that the link between economic optimism and Tory support has irrevocably broken down for the Government, however shrewd a budget Ken Clarke produces. It's a worry that still haunts the Tories. But if it hasn't, there are no quick fixes; there's no turning back from the strategy already set by Brown and Blair.

JULIE LISO

the commentators

15

How I would free drivers from gridlock



John Redwood

Councils have gone mad: spending on bollards, chicanes, speed cameras – the more they do, the slower the traffic

traffic flowing.

We have gridlock. The rush hour begins just after 6am and is still in full flow three hours later. In many parts of the south east the traffic queue for one junction runs into the queue for the next and for the one beyond that. The station car park is full. The queue for Heathrow is long. The M25 regularly seizes up. Everyone tells me something should be done about it.

The authorities are far from idle. The more traffic that herds on to the road, the more barriers to its movement they impose. The slower the traffic flows, the tighter the speed controls are. Many a Lib-Lab county or borough has gone mad, spending a fortune on bollards, chicanes, red road surfaces, traffic lights and speed cameras. We now regularly enjoy radar traps to supplement the speed cameras, and police cars to supervise the jams.

The latest theory is that we will overcome the crisis by shifting people from car to bus and train. Berkshire County has solved the problem by writing a consultation document telling us all to get out of our cars and on to the bus. All of this has been thought up by a county that offers free parking places to its employees, 91 per cent of whom drive to work. When I asked them to explain why they do not practise what they preach, I was told that their jobs need the flexibility of the motor car. Precisely! And so do many others need that flexibility.

What could the counties and boroughs of Britain do to make the situation better? They are not powerless. First they should stop cluttering up the main routes with unnecessary ironmongery and technology. Taking what little road space we do have out of circulation or deliberately slowing traffic too much makes the problem worse. It even increases the emissions to the atmosphere, as lorries and cars sit with engines running, waiting for the obstruction to clear. One man's traffic calming is another man's road rage.

They could start to solve some of the underlying transport problem. The traffic chaos is worst in term-time, when parents are delivering children to schools. Secondary school pupils should usually be expected to go to school themselves. They should be encouraged to cycle, walk or go by bus. Counties should ensure that, if there are not proper general service buses, there are school buses to do the job.

For primaries, counties should look at organising minibuses to pick up from main housing areas. More parents would pay for this service if the driver was responsible for seeing the child safely into school. As one of the largest employers in each area, the county or borough should organise employee

buses for all their staff who would like to be spared the hassle and cost of a car journey. It would be an example for the other large employers to consider, if it worked well.

Transport authorities and central government should plan the road works sensibly. A few weeks ago, for anyone coming in from the west of London, there were roadworks on the M4, M3, A30 and A40 all at the same time. Blocking one lane on any of these roads is restriction enough. To impede four inbound lanes from the west causes seizure. More money should be spent to mend the M3, before spending money on the M4, and after that on the A40 or A30.

The main A roads, especially the main routes into London, should be freed of any traffic management impediments. There should be uniform sensible speed limit – 60mph for dual carriageways and 40mph for single carriageways. At the moment the driver has to be constantly decelerating and accelerating if the road is clear – from 70mph to 60 to 40 to 30 to 20. With cameras these speed restrictions are becoming dangerous in themselves, causing sudden breaking and bunching. Parking restrictions on radials into London should be firmly enforced by towing offenders away promptly and fining them heavily. Red routes should be universal on A-road radials to keep the

people would use trains more if services were frequent and reliable, and if car parks are easy to use and safe. All too often people using the car park for day train trips find the car smashed up on return because no security system is in place. There need to be cameras or a guard for the car park. The new train companies seem keener on promoting train travel than BR used to be. If they can run frequent and reliable services more of us will use them more of the time. Oxford has shown how popular park and ride bus services can be – to the point where they now have a pollution problem from the diesel buses.

The authorities are getting in the way of a solution. Throwing more cameras, chicanes, humps and bus lanes into the battle will make things worse. They should spend less money and spend it better. Mend one road at a time. Create park-and-ride car parks for buses and trains. Clear through routes of clutter. Allow more houses and shops in or near town centres. Put more information about jams and free routes on the gantries above the motorways. These are the practical measures which could stop the gridlock spreading.

The writer is MP for Wokingham and was Secretary of State for Wales from 1993 to 1995.

Ken Saro-Wiwa was never a saint



Donu Kogbara grew up as a family friend of the Ogoni dissident hanged a year ago by the Nigerians. Here she sympathises with the man and his cause, but also tells of his pursuit of power and wealth, and how his politics led to the death of his moderate allies

Whenever anyone dares to hint that Ken Saro-Wiwa was not a saint – as Richard North did in Friday's *Independent* – there are outraged responses from people who have no significant knowledge of Ogoniland or Saro-Wiwa's complex personality.

I totally understand why Ken's son – Ken Wiwa – reacts emotionally to my remarks that tarnish his father's image. But everyone else should be able to stand back and calmly listen to criticisms of the man.

I am an Ogoni myself. My father is a businessman and politician. He has been a minister for trade/industry. He was also a state chairman of Nigeria's last democratic government and a rebel Biafran ambassador in London in the 1960s when Saro-Wiwa was one of the minuscule number of Ogonis who were firm friends of the Nigerian federal military government.

The Nigerian military won the Biafran civil war. My father was sentenced to death in absentia and forced to live in exile in Britain. Unlike 99 per cent of Ogonis, Saro-Wiwa did well out of that civil war. When everyone else was broke, he was rolling in it.

But my father's differences with Saro-Wiwa were eventually forgiven and I grew up in the 1970s knowing and being encouraged to like Saro-Wiwa. It was easy to like him. He even bought me my first typewriter.

Saro-Wiwa had never been 100 per cent idealistic about anything. Read some of his earliest writings and you'll discover that he opposed those who supported the Biafran civil war mostly because he thought that sedition was bad for one's career.

And if you could have tuned into some of his conversations with me in the late 1980s/early 1990s, you'd have discovered that he later changed his mind about sedition and decided that it was a great vehicle for ambitious African politicians.

Saro-Wiwa told me that if I totally committed myself to his campaign, I would become dazzlingly famous and rich beyond my wildest dreams. He enjoyed listing all the "silly" white liberals who might bankroll the Ogoni cause (which he had conveniently

ignored in the 1960s). He used to tell me, in fairly bitter tones, that whale-saving white liberals didn't care about the Third World's "real" problems. "But environmental complaints will get to them," he would add.

And while politely exempting myself from Saro-Wiwa's self-aggrandising plans, I half-heartedly wished him well, knowing that he wasn't totally cynical and sure that Ogonis would benefit indirectly if he got famous and even richer.

I did not approve of the kangaroo court that sentenced Ken Saro-Wiwa; and I was horrified when he was judicially murdered by Nigeria's brutal military dictators. But whenever I'm asked to comment on Saro-Wiwa's erudite, swashbuckling life and truly tragic death, I feel obliged to say that, despite his good qualities and the fact that his aims were partly laudable, he was an awesomely efficient publicity-manipulator who had a dark, power-hungry, rabble-rousing side that led to the deaths of four Ogoni moderates. He was a risk-taker. And he lost the gamble.

When Saro-Wiwa started his environmental campaign, the Ogoni elite were divided between radicals like Saro-Wiwa who favoured the sabotaging of oil pipelines and moderates like his brother-in-law, Chief Orage, and my father who shared his basic aims but felt that guerrilla action would encourage the military to lash out.

Saro-Wiwa took exception to those who urged caution and, according to witnesses whom I've met, ordered the hotheads who surrounded him to take harsh action against them. My father narrowly escaped death at a public rally. Saro-Wiwa's brother-in-law and three other men were not so lucky. They were butchered in broad daylight. Local villagers say they were killed by known members of Saro-Wiwa's private army. One chap who openly threatened to testify against Saro-Wiwa's thugs had a nail driven into his skull before Saro-Wiwa's trial.

Amnesty International, Greenpeace and other observers and commentators (including Wole Soyinka, the

Problems with the touchy-feely stuff

by Jack O'Sullivan



Who has got what it takes to replace Marje Proops as queen of the agony aunts? One thing's for sure, her successor is unlikely to be male

death of Marjorie Proops has provoked a fury of speculation: who will succeed her as the most celebrated and prolific agony aunt? Will the warm and cuddly Claire Rayner be lured to the throne in Canary Wharf? Could the tenebrous Anna Raeburn be tempted away from Mohammed Al Fayed's new Liberty radio station. Or will a new pretender take the crown that Marje defended so fiercely?

The role of agony aunt is up for examination. What makes a good one? There is a joke among the top practitioners that the key qualification is to be a Jewish mama. "Maybe Jews have been so good at it, because we have such an intense intellectual curiosity," says Claire Rayner. "Our history of persecution means we know that all we have is each other and we also have the capacity to find humour in the most appalling circumstances." For Irma Kurtz of *Cosmopolitan*, Jewishness has encouraged portable skills, most importantly "common sense", which an agony aunt needs in huge quantities.

The demands of the job, she says, remain constant: "The basis of all the agony I get is a low self-esteem, a failure to feel one's own beauty and power. That's the core of it – not being sure of one's self."

There is a new group whose self-esteem is sinking fast: Men. Are today's agony aunts up to the job of helping men, who as a result of rapid social change have more and more problems?

This is particularly important when replacing Marje. Because you can be quite sure there is one question no one is asking: what about hiring a bloke? The reason? Newspaper editors are solid, almost to a man, in seeing the touchy-feely stuff as being the exclusive preserve of women.

Philip Hodson, a highly-regarded member of Britain's small circle of "agony uncles", has personal experience of this prejudice. His first foray as a national newspaper advice columnist was on the *Daily Star*. The arrival of a new editor, Lloyd Turner, produced a short meeting: "From tomorrow morning, your column is being written by Diana Dors." Next, he was offered the agony column on the *Sunday Mirror* by the Eve Pollard. "It was vetoed by Robert Maxwell, who said I didn't have a big enough bust," says Hodson. On the third occasion, another female editor, Patsy Chapman, then editor of the *News of the World*, installed

him in the agony slot. Two and a half years later, a male editor, Piers Morgan, replaced her, and surprise surprise, Hodson was given the chop. Today, he writes his column for *Family Circle*, the women's magazine.

"As a rule," says Hodson,

"my experience of most male newspaper editors is that they are very sexist. They believe that men should be out there doing the war stories. They are also homophobic. They are dis-

turbed by any feminine aspect coming out in a male columnist, which, after all, you have to bring out if you are going to deal with emotional problems.

In the end, they will change, because they're not stupid. They will see there is a market for it. Looking at the future, it is clear that men will probably have more emotional problems than women in the home and in the workplace. But they will be difficult to deal with because

part of masculinity is the belief that men can cope. An outlet is needed for these problems. An agony uncle can offer a role model, a person who knows what it feels like to be a man.

The ruling clan of agony aunts is unimpressed. Irma Kurtz doesn't rate male pretenders. "You guys don't talk to each other like women. Two women meet as strangers and after five minutes they're almost each other's blood donors. We

go straight to the gut, the heart or the sex organ, depending on what the problem is."

Claire Rayner agrees. "Both men and women prefer generally to talk to a woman. It's probably because most adults today have been raised by a woman and so they feel more comfortable telling a woman about difficult issues."

Deidre Sanders, *The Sun's* agony aunt, says there is a reason why agony uncles shouldn't do well. "But when newspapers have tried them, they have found a whole range of family problems that readers had which they didn't want to raise with a man. The posting tended to fill up with men writing to another man about sexual problems."

But teenage magazines are already demonstrating that there is a gap in the market. Men are needed to get certain problems out into the open and magazines have appointed agony uncles. The girls write in to find out what's going on in their boyfriends' heads.

This week in *Mor*, the advice columnist Tony offers some robust advice to Janey who is worried that her boyfriend makes of the "farting" noise, when she's on top. "It should take more than an embarrassing noise to make any lad worth his salt bolt for the door ... After all, blokes aren't exactly silent movers when it comes to expelling air, are they?" He also replies to a teenager worried that her boyfriend has never said he loves her. "It's a bloke thing," says Tony. "Try to find comfort in the fact that your boyfriend is not alone in the trouble he has getting the 'I' word from his brain to his mouth."

Nick Fisher on *Just Seventeen* works alongside a female colleague who also writes a column. This week he helps out a reader who complains that "my wifey is a class jock," after he unzipped to flaunt his tackle to his friends. "Of course," reassures Fisher, "your mates will tell girls how teensy it is, because it makes them feel safe that you're not of ridicule and not them."

Fisher says, "There is a very good case for newspapers to have both an agony aunt and an agony uncle. I'm not knocking an agony uncle, but if I was a twenty-something bloke, then I would feel that she was very far removed from my experience and I would wonder if she could tell me anything about my life."

So which newspaper is going to take the plunge and trust a man with the touchy-feely stuff? After all, the first agony columnist wasn't a woman. It was Daniel Defoe.

Yesterday was a day of Remembrance.

Yesteray you remembered the men, women and children who suffered and died because of the horrors of war. You remembered soldiers, sailors, airmen and civilians with equal sadness.

Now we'd like you to extend those thoughts a little further – to the people suffering today, all around the world, because of war.

Right now, in Central Africa, the brutalities of war are claiming victims in large numbers. Already one million people are fleeing the fighting.

It doesn't matter whether they are Hutu, Tutsi, Zairean or Rwandan. Women and children are fleeing in terror. Starvation, thirst and disease will kill them, even if the bullets don't.

These victims have no more control over their suffering than did the families during the Blitz – or any of the other victims of mankind's inhumanity.

We will go on helping those who suffer through war. And when the wars are over, we will go on helping the survivors to rebuild their lives. We will not forget them, either.

To make a donation to help our work in Central Africa, please call 01865 31 31 31.

And so is today.



Founded in 1942, Oxfam works with poor people regardless of race or religion in their struggle against hunger, disease, exploitation and poverty.

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obituaries / gazette

Marjorie Proops

Marjorie Proops was a great deal more than an agony aunt, a brilliant writer, a campaigning journalist and a social commentator. She was the nation's confidante. Into her office for over 30 years the letters came, millions of them, criss for help, for encouragement, from men as well as women, in the certain knowledge that they were writing not to a stranger but a friend, to "Dear Marje" - there were envelopes addressed simply thus, which safely reached her - and that behind the witty by-line, the funny drawings, the glamorous photographs, was a woman of extraordinary perception, tolerance, and hard-headed wisdom.

She was born Rebecca Marjorie Israel, in Woking, the elder daughter of Alfred and Martha Israel (their surname was later changed to Rayle by her father, in resigned deference to prejudice); she spent her childhood living over her father's pub when the family moved to London. She became a socialist at the age of five on discovering the demand for a saloon bar as opposed to a public one. At much the same age, she fell in love with her mother's newspaper, the *Daily Mirror*. The page she later had in the paper would have been headed differently had she not been taunted as a child with the tag "Becky the Jew girl". "Marjorie" was safer.

She was gifted rather than clever at school, starring only at English and art and having a fine contralto voice. Advised against matriculation by her teachers, she took a course at Hackney Technical College which taught her to draw and led her to her first job, working in a studio near Smithfield for 15 shillings a week. Her mentor there was one Rose May, whom Marje sought to emulate in every way, from her heavy make-up and extravagant hats to her habit of heavy smoking. It took the discovery of a blocked carotid artery almost half a century later to wean her from her cigarettes and the long holder that became closely identified with her.

Her first published work was a drawing of a baby for a knitwear catalogue. Encouraged by this and other minor successes, and in the spirit of enterprise that was to distinguish her entire life, she took on her own studio for 3s 6d a week and went freelance. Within months she was taking commissions from several women's magazines as well as the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*.

Her mother, however, was more interested in Marje's mar-

ital prospects; Marje was gloomily aware that she was failing her in this respect when she set out in search of a partner at the tennis club on Christmas morning in 1934 and met Neddy Proops. He bought her a hot lemonade, revealed his admiration for Jesus of Nazareth, whom he considered the first socialist, and won her heart; three days later they were engaged - on the strict (and for those days unusual) understanding that she could continue with her career. She and Proopsie - so nicknamed by her to distinguish him from the other Sidneys of her acquaintance - were married in Shackwell Lane Synagogue, in Dalston, in November 1935.

The marriage was not entirely happy, although proclaimed as such by Marje herself for the 53 years of its duration and resulting in the birth of her beloved son Robert in 1941. Proopsie, whatever his shortcomings in private as a husband remained, outwardly at least, a loyal and supportive consort to his wife. Marje and Proopsie, whatever their differences, shared a strong socialist ideology: they fostered a small boy from a children's home (with fairly disastrous consequences) and then more successfully befriended, and eventually gave a home to, Made Okubadeju, now a successful pathologist from Nigeria, who called Marje "Mum" and whom she always regarded as a second son.

Hugh Cudlipp hired Marje Proops in 1939, to draw hats and represent the *Daily Mirror* at Ascot under the by-line "Sylvaime". He put her on a retainer of six guineas a week during the Second World War and took her on as columnist at the *Mirror* in 1954. He remained a huge force in her life: she often declared herself his creature.

She wrote her first article during the war for *Good Taste* magazine and first entered the field where she was to become best-known by writing a government information booklet on VD; she said she never saw sex in quite the same romantic light again.

In 1945 she went to the *Daily Herald* as Fashion Editor, under Hugh Cudlipp's brother Percy, and became Women's Editor in 1950; she never learnt to type or do shorthand, and wrote all her copy in longhand (rather harder to read after her stroke in 1979), developing the effortless, classless style that she never changed; "as acceptable", said her friend and long-time colleague Felicity Green, "to readers of the *Times* or the *Telegraph* as the *Mirror*". Bob Edwards, one of her editors, asked

Glamour, pizazz, pulling power: Hugh Cudlipp described Marje Proops as "the first British journalist to attain Instant Recognition status"

her if she had anyone to help her turn out her pieces. "She drew herself up to her considerable height and said she wrote every single word that appears under her name."

It was during this period at the *Herald* that she had a glimpse of her future. The paper's advice columnist, Mary Marshall, had died. Marje Proops became worried by the letters piling up, and took it upon herself to open and answer them. What she found in those letters in terms of human misery appalled her; she contacted the psychologist Eustace Chesser, asked him if he could come and see him, and went

through the more difficult letters with him. Chesser was greatly impressed by what he called her humility in seeking advice.

Hugh Cudlipp hired her as a columnist on the *Daily Mirror* in 1954; he has described her since as "the first British journalist to attain the Instant Recognition status previously enjoyed by film stars". It was her ability to make friends with, to get along with, the subjects of her column that made her pages so original. They all genuinely liked her: she became Dame Edith Sitwell's "little friend", Cary Grant's frequent luncheon companion, the then Duke of

Bedford's partner in a mid-looking at the PM, whoever it was, Margaret Thatcher included, and rush over to talk to her. And she loved it. She was such a true star." As Percy Cudlipp had said, she was a sex writer. She had glamour, pizazz, pulling power. She was a huge part of a huge success, one of many starry names littering the firmament of the *Daily Mirror*.

One of the most important, if less starry, was that of Phillip Levy: a tall, quiet, immensely impressive man, he was the *Mirror*'s chief legal adviser from 1955 to 1970. Proops's 20-year-long passionate love affair with him was conducted with immense discretion, both at the

establishment, quoted in the most lofny newspapers, granted an exclusive interview with Princess Anne, reviewed by her biographer Angela Patmore, in *Marje, the gail and the gingerbread*, 1993. And, much as she adored Levy, she never considered leaving Proopsie, and often said that in the end, when they had both died, it was Proopsie she missed more.

Gradually the nature of her page changed towards the end of the Sixties: she began to write about more serious subjects, reflecting the letters of her readers, about the birth-rate of illegitimate children, about the Pill, drug addiction, the abortion law, sometimes hanging a whole feature on one letter. Hugh Cudlipp, ever sensitive to the demands of a newspaper, had observed the success of her "Dear Marje" advice column, which ran from 1971 onwards in the weekly magazine *Woman's Mirror*, and suggested

she did the same thing for the *Daily Mirror*. Proops was doubtful; despite her admiration for "Dear Abby" in the United States, perhaps her closest role model, she found it hard to see how she could be all things to all men: sex writer, starry columnist and serious adviser as well. Cudlipp was rightly convinced that she could. But she took her work immensely seriously: this was not just journalism, it was a crusade. She drew on a team of experts, including Chesser, developed connections with the police, with doctors, with the Church, insisted on a team of secretarial help to ensure no letter went unanswered. Only the more light-hearted problems appeared in print; the darker, more complex ones she answered personally, even taking telephone calls from desperate cases, referring them on to whoever she felt best to help.

Proops became a campaigning journalist, changing people's perceptions to an extent now hard to imagine, so thoroughly did she break new moral ground. Never a militant feminist (she always said she liked men too much for that), she was nevertheless a huge champion of women's causes. She spoke out in favour of pre-marital sex, of contraception, of open, unequivocal sex education, of a more tolerant attitude to homosexuality.

By the Seventies, she had become an establishment figure; she served on two government committees, one on One-Parent Families, appointed by Richard Crossman, and the other the gambling commission chaired by the late Lord Rothschild. She was taken seriously by the Es-

teem, quoted in the most lofny newspapers, granted an exclusive interview with Princess Anne, reviewed by her biographer Angela Patmore, in *Marje, the gail and the gingerbread*, 1993. And, much as she adored Levy, she never considered leaving Proopsie, and often said that in the end, when they had both died, it was Proopsie she missed more.

She and Proopsie lived in a modestly grand house in St John's Wood, north London, and she grew a rather dashing MGB GT, and dressed with great style; but she never abandoned her socialist principles - was a staunch member of the NUL, and her proudest achievement was her appointment by her then editor, Mike Molloy, as "Assistant Editor of the *Mirror*".

She was appointed OBE in 1969, named Woman of the Year in 1984, given a place in Madame Tussaud's in 1977 - and in 1971 appeared on *This is Your Life*.

Ill-health stalked her later years: she sustained a stroke during a bypass operation in 1979, had two hip replacements (after a long spell in a wheelchair), breast cancer in 1992 and, perhaps most seriously, a psychiatric breakdown in 1996. She conquered them all with her triumphant courage; and her page never failed to appear.

She worked in the *Mirror* buildings, survived 10 editions of the *Daily Mirror*, and three proprietors, not least Robert Maxwell, with whom she had a flirtatiously successful relationship, while not entirely approving of what he was doing to her beloved newspaper.

"Marje is made of tempered steel," said Felicity Green. "Much more many-faced than anyone might realise. A wonderful, warts-and-all character and the warts are what make her much more interesting." She often declared her passionate desire to die at the *Mirror*, "then the cleaners can come and sweep me up". Her last column was published last Tuesday; it could be said she very nearly achieved that ambition.

Marje Proops failed no one, ever not her readers, her editors, her family, or her friends. There could perhaps be no greater tribute to her than that.

Penny Vincenzi

Rebecca Marjorie Israel, journalist: born Woking, Surrey c1911; journalist, *Daily Mirror* 1939-45, 1954-96; Assistant Editor 1978-96; Fashion Editor, *Daily Herald* 1945-50; *Woman's Editor* 1950-54; OBE 1969; journalist, *Sunday Mirror* 1972-90; married 1935 Sidney Proops (died 1988; one son); died London 10 November 1996.



Eddie Harris

Most jazz musicians develop an individual sound when they are young and then work at honing it over the rest of their lives: Louis Armstrong, when he died in 1971, had a trumpet style which was irrevocably linked to his eloquent playing of the Twenties. The saxophonist Eddie Harris was almost unique in leaping to fame without ever having a consistent and recognisable sound. He made more noises than a shed full of monkeys and the trouble was that most of them were new and then instantly obsolescent.

On the other hand, he laughed all the way to the bank. His first hit, a version of the theme from the film *Exodus*, entered the Top 40 and sold a million copies in 1960. Miles Davis

stooped down to record Harris's composition "Freedom Jazz Dance", a reasonable post-bebop jazz tune, in 1966 and the recording of "Compared To What?", extracted from the album *Swiss Movement* which Harris made at the 1969 Montreux Jazz Festival with his composter pianist, Les McCann, sold another million copies.

Born in Chicago, Harris was based there all his life, despite a successful period in New York and constant tours around the world. He began his career studying piano with a cousin and singing with choirs in Baptist churches. He made his professional debut as pianist with the trumpeter Clark Terry told me at the time, "I've been working on my trumpet tone all my life until I think it's good and it's what I want.

rather than emulating them. Eddie is a better word for his bizarre contrivances. He sometimes played a tenor saxophone with a trombone mouthpiece and a similar combination called a reed trumpet, and his eccentricities made him very much a loner within the jazz community. In 1967 he was the first to unleash upon the world the Vari-tone attachment to his tenor saxophone. This device gave the instrument a completely new range of electronic sounds - at the expense of the individuality of the player. Saddled with one, the trumpeter Clark Terry told me at the time, "I've been working on my trumpet tone all my life until I think it's good and it's what I want.

The guy who invented this takes all that away and leaves me as an electronic bubble."

When Harris played the tenor saxophone, his main instrument, in an orthodox way, he remained enigmatic. At that time black players were supposed to sound harsh and angular like Sonny Rollins or John Coltrane. Listeners in clubs became disorientated as Harris produced a "white" sound, smooth in the manner of Stan Getz or Al Cohn. For this reason, Harris was never trusted by the jazz aficionado. "A lot of musicians are suspicious of electronics," he said. "I can understand that because you always have opposition to change. Change breeds contempt because whatever your

beliefs are you have to go back and examine them.

"Amplification will add 10 years to your life-span because you don't have to exert yourself as much. The unit I use is a pre-amp unit which can emulate different woodwind sounds. At the press of a button it can sound like a bassoon or a tuba or an oboe or whatever: they have complicated on the chassis system."

It is an unfortunate fact that there is a tide of racial preference which constantly ebbs and flows in jazz. During the Sixties and also today, jazz played by black musicians is the ascendant, making it difficult for white musicians of similar talents to get as much work as their black colleagues. Harris had an aggressive phi-

losophy in this respect, but also recognised that established white musicians could also create work for blacks.

As long ago as 1967 he said, "I think the jazz scene is finally going to evolve into a going thing again - Don Ellis' (a white trumpeter band-mate of Harris') "has his big band, and there's Stan Kenton and Buddy Rich. I'm pulling for them, because I consider them the Elvis Presleys and Bobby Darins of jazz - and, once they make it, the coloured musicians will naturally have to make it, too."

One of the best-known of the

multitude of Harris's albums was made during a visit to England in 1972 when he recorded *Eddie Harris in the UK* with the British rock stars Stevie Win-

wood, Jeff Beck, Zoot Money, Rich Grech and Albert Lee.

Harris continued to record until recently, making a remarkable album in 1992, *For You, For Me, For Ever More*, the circumstances of which in some way typified his musical life. He had intended to record a duo session with a pianist and Harris on tenor but, when the pianist didn't show up, Harris recorded all the piano parts first, and then added his tenor sax improvisations. Despite a brave effort, the results were flawed.

Steve Vose

Eddie Harris, tenor saxophonist, pianist, organist, vocalist, composer: born Chicago 20 October 1936; died Los Angeles 5 November 1996.



Births, Marriages & Deaths

BIRTHS

ALLENBY: son of Hutchings. GRAVES: On 10 November, to Amanda (née Marjorie) and James (née) Dennis William Mitchell, a brother for Stephan.

HUTCHINGS: On 10 November, to Nicole (née Allenby), and Richard, a son, John Edward, a brother for Giles Nicholas.

DEATHS

JERRETT: Samuel H. Jerrett OBE PD DL, on 5 November, aged 78 years. Donald, son of Jackie and Jackie, and father of Arthur and Suzi, Service at Tretham Parish Church, Truro, Cornwall, on Friday 15 November. Donations preferred to St John Ambulance, 18 Liskeard Street, Falmouth, ST1 4JJ. Enquiries to Funeral Brothers Funeral Services, St Ives-on-Trent, Telephone 01736 313674.

RADICE: Edward Albert (Teddy) suddenly, following a stroke, on 8 November, at the age of 89. He will be greatly missed by family and friends. At his request there will be no ceremony, but a memorial service will be arranged at St Antony's College, Oxford.

ANNOUNCEMENTS FOR GAZETTE Births, Marriages & Deaths

Forthcoming marriages

Ms S. A. Lovegrove and Miss K. C. Brooke

The engagement is announced between Stephen, son of Mr and Mrs John Lovegrove, of Great Alne, Warwickshire, and Kate, daughter of Mr Timothy and the Hon Mrs Sergio-Brooke, of Clippingdon, Northamptonshire.

BIRTHDAYS

Dame Peggy Farmer MP 74; Lord Goff of Chieveley, a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary, 70; Sir William Heyes, President, St John's College, Oxford, 66; Dr Joseph Herniman MP, 63; Miss Kim Hunter, actress, 24; Sir Peter Lloyd MP, 59; Miss Jennifer Page, chief executive, Millennium Commission, 52; Miss Stephanie Powers, actress, 32; Miss Jo Stafford, singer, 78; Sir William Sutherland, Chief Constable, Lothian and Borders Police, 63; Professor John Tarrant, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Huddersfield University, 55; Preliminary Chad Varah, founder of the Samaritans, 85; Mr Neil Young, rock singer and guitarist, 50.

Anniversaries

Births: Edward Vernon ("Old Grog"), Admiral, 1634; Alexander

Porfirievich Borodin, composer, 1833; François-Auguste Rodin, sculptor, 1840; Princess Grace of Monaco (Grace Patricia Kelly), 1929. Deaths: Camille (the Great), King of England and Denmark, 1035; Sir John Hawkwood, naval commander and navigator, 1395; Thomas Fairfax, third Baron Fairfax of Cameron, Parliamentary army Commander-in-Chief, 1671; Mrs Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, novelist, 1865; Emma Magdalena Rosalia Marie Josepha Barbara, Baroness Gruenberg, novelist, 1947; John Leech, cartoonist, 1854; Sir Michael Innes, literary scholar and author, 1994. On this day: John Bunyan, author, was arrested for preaching without a licence, 1660; the first Jewish newspaper in Britain, the *Jewish Chronicle*, was published, 1731; the first flying-trapeze act was performed by Jules Léonard at the Cirque Napoleon, Paris, 1859; a great eruption of Mount Vesuvius occurred, 1770; the remains of Captain Scott and his companions were found in Antarctica, 1912; the Emperor Karl of Austria-Hungary abdicated, and Austria became a republic, 1918; in elections in Germany, the Nazis received 92 per cent of the votes, 1933; the Allies took Tobruk, 1942. Today is the Feast Day of St Astrid or Annesius, St Benedict of Benvento, St Cadoc, St Camian the Tall, St Cuthbert, St Eusebius Callistus, St Josaphat of Polotsk, St

Lebuin or Lefabine, St Livinus, St Macar or Macumba and St Nilus the Elder.

Lectures

National Gallery: Mari Griffith, "Grand Tour (ii): Richard Wilson and Thomas Gainsborough", 1pm.

Victoria and Albert Museum: Caroline Rimell, "Metal Inlaid Decoration on Furniture", 2.30pm.

Tate Gallery: David Jacobson, "Fascists in Gardens: the Art of English Painting", 1pm.

British Museum: Nicole Doyon, "Myths of Creation and the Gods of Ancient Egypt", 1.15pm.

RIBA Architecture Centre, London W1: Ross Lovegrove talks about his work, 6.30pm.

Longer prison sentences for knife killings

LAW REPORT

12 November 1996

er young men in the car park of a night club in Gillingham, Kent. The offender produced a knife and stabbed four of his opponents. One of them died and the others required hospital treatment.

In interview the offender said he had been attacked and had used a knife in self

JEREMY WARREN

business & city

Business news desk: tel 0171-293 2636 fax 0171-293 2098

BUSINESS & CITY EDITOR: JEREMY WARNER

CBI in Harrogate: Gordon Brown unveils anti-inflation strategy as John Monks calls for partnership between employers and unions

No windfall tax details until Labour is in power

Michael Harrison
and Chris Godsmark

Labour yesterday disclosed that it would not spell out details of its windfall tax on the privatised utilities until it was in power. But it went further than it has gone before in setting out its tough anti-inflationary strategy, indicating that it would aim at a target of under 2.5 per cent.

Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor, said Labour would take representations from all interested parties on the windfall levy and "announce the details of its implementation once, in government, we have consulted the regulators".

The comment, in an address to the Confederation of British Industry annual conference in Harrogate, surprised business leaders who had expected details of the tax to emerge by the time of Labour's manifesto.

However, CBI leaders took heart at Mr Brown's pledge on low and stable inflation and his commitment to keep it at or below the rate of rival economies such as Germany. Mr Brown said: "We will not be satisfied with simply talking as tough as the Tories. For, unlike the Government, we plan to deliver on our inflation target. We will want our inflation performance to match that of our competitors in Europe."

If that was achieved then "never again should interest rate decisions affecting the long term appear to be manipulated for short-term party political ends," he said. Aides said later that a target of 2.5 per cent or less was "sensible", pointing out that inflation was running at 2.9 per cent against the Government's target of 2.5 per cent and a European average of 2.4 per cent.

A CBI spokesman said it

welcomed Labour's commitment to low and stable inflation. But the further delay in detailing which companies will face the tax, how it will be structured and how much it will raise fuelled speculation that Labour has run into legal difficulties over the controversial levy.

Mr Brown emphasised it would be a "one-off windfall levy from the excess profits of the privatised utilities". "I think people increasingly understand that the windfall levy is going to happen and that it is a measure which has a clear and identifiable purpose," he said.

His aides said that in principle all privatised utilities would be considered for inclusion in the tax but they could not give a definition of which companies would be vulnerable. Estimates of how much the tax might raise range from £5bn to £10bn but a great deal hinges on how the tax is framed.

Labour sources conceded that Alastair Campbell, press secretary to Labour leader Tony Blair, had "dropped a clanger" when he stated last week that the tax would apply to "privatised monopoly utilities". That enabled the electricity generator PowerGen to claim that it would escape the levy.

Michael Heseltine, deputy Prime Minister, stepped up pressure on Labour over the windfall tax, describing it as "Danegeld". "And you know the moral of that story. Once you've paid the Danegeld you never get rid of the Danes."

Mr Heseltine claimed that the levy would mean lower investment, higher prices, or both.

"It's a proposed levy on each of us. On 8 million shareholders. On every consumer of gas, water, electricity. On everyone with a telephone. On jobs, on pensions."

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

John Monks, general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, yesterday urged employers to end their campaign against European legislation to impose a maximum 48-hour working week on British companies.

In the first speech to the CBI's annual conference by a TUC leader, Mr Monks insisted that the rise of what he called "the European dimension" was inevitable, despite the Government's opt-out from the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty, and the desire of busi-

nesses to "be like Greta Garbo and be left alone".

The European Court of Justice will today hand out judgement on the UK's objections to the directive on working hours, which gets round the British opt-out on social legislation by treating the 48-hour week as a health and safety issue.

Mr Monks appealed for a partnership with employers to help implement the new rules.

"If it does happen I hope that it will lead to consultation about how it can be applied flexibly and efficiently, but effectively in the UK," he told delegates.

The TUC leader pledged to work for a new partnership with business, but in a combative address argued that the British tradition of benevolent employers was getting weaker.

He said: "The relentless pressure to enhance shareholder value has damaged it in many a British company and in some cases destroyed it altogether." He gave the example of Marks & Spencer, which last week announced it would take on an extra 2,000 staff and saw its shares immediately marked down by City investors.

Mr Monks' speech was warmly applauded by dele-

gates, his attitude to Europe exposed sharp differences in the conference hall. Another speaker, John Neill, the chief executive of the Unipart car parts group, attacked the "scrofulous vision" behind the Social Chapter.

"We don't need to sign a blank cheque to Brussels," he said. Unipart is well known for its high-profile employee training schemes with a company "university" and its backing for the concept of stakeholding.

However the company deregistered from its plants in 1991. Mr Neill said Britain now

ranked far ahead of France, Germany or Italy on labour flexibility as a result of policies pioneered by Lady Thatcher in the early eighties. Imposing new burdens on business, he said, would see the UK flattened by "Asian juggernauts".

Several other speakers were more conciliatory, backing Mr Monks' talk of partnerships with unions. Bruce Warman, personnel director of the Vauxhall car company and a former colleague of Mr Neill, said: "We have European legislation ebbing at our shores. Maybe it's a tidal wave and we cannot ignore trade unions."

Kay and ICI lock horns on policy

Michael Harrison

John Kay, an arch proponent of the shareholder philosophy and an adviser to Tony Blair, was at loggerheads with ICI yesterday after he accused the chemicals group of putting profits above the interests of customers, employees and local communities.

Professor Kay, chairman of London Economics, said that ICI, chaired by Sir Ronnic Hampele, who also heads up Cadbury II, had changed its business strategy after the abortive takeover attempt by Hanson to one that "acknowledges no claim other than that of shareholders".

He went on to compare his approach with that of Marks & Spencer, which was successful because its commitment to employees and customers was not a policy of the board but a characteristic of the very company.

Professor Kay said that in 1986 ICI's stated objectives were to "enhance the wealth and well-being of our shareholders, our employees, our customers and the communities which we serve and in which we operate" through innovative and responsible application of chemistry. After the Hanson bid its objective instead became to "maximise value for our shareholders by focusing on businesses where we have market leadership, a technological edge and a world competitive base".

This change of tack, Professor Kay said, was the product of a "deformed style of capitalism" which, far from underpinning the market system, would bring it to its knees. But ICI said it had devised a fresh set of objectives and mission statement since Charles Miller-Smith took over as chief executive a year ago.

This says: "Our vision is to be the industry leader in creating value for customers and shareholders." This would be achieved by, among other things, "inspiration and reward of talented people, exemplary performance in safety and health and responsible for the environment".

'End campaign against 48-hour week'

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

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Carpetbaggers cash in on A&L loophole

Nic Cicutti

Alliance & Leicester "carpetbaggers", whom the building society tried to shut out of a £1,000 free shares handout when the society floats on the stock market, are in line for cash payouts worth thousands of pounds instead because of a legal loophole.

The society sparked anger from many policyholders last month after announcing that it aimed to give each of its 2.4 million members a fixed amount of 250 shares each on flotation.

Other societies, including

Halifax and Woolwich, intend to give extra amounts depending on savings balances.

Policyholders who joined the A&L after its 31 December 1995 cut-off date for new accounts cannot vote next month on the planned flotation. And the Building Societies Act says they are therefore not entitled to free shares after conversion in 1997.

However, because accounts opened between 31 December and 16 January, when they were halted, give the "carpetbaggers" all other membership rights, they are still entitled to

a cash share of the society's assets. Payouts will be based on about 11 per cent of the amount in an individual's account.

John Denison, an A&L member, said: "A loyal investor who has had £50,000 in an account dating from any time before 31 December will be eligible to vote and, if the proposals go ahead, he will receive the flat rate 250 shares worth about £1,000." The "carpetbagger", who opened an account with £50,000 after that date, is entitled to receive, if the proposals go ahead, a statutory cash bonus of £5,500. I find this be-

yond belief." Those benefiting will be among the few thousand who opened accounts in the two-week period in January, when the A&L finally scrapped membership rights accounts.

The society tried to limit the free cash entitlement by setting 31 January as the final date for boosting the amount in a policyholders' account. But savers adding to their balances before the cash will be entitled to the cash.

An A&L spokesman said: "We estimate that the total number of people who will benefit from this loophole is insignificant and have done everything we can to stop 'January Joiners', as we call them, from benefiting disproportionately."

He added that the society's flat-rate shares distribution was fair because 83 per cent of the society's eligible members had less than £5,000 in their accounts.

Woolwich said yesterday that none of its carpetbaggers, who joined just before the flotation was announced, would receive similar benefits because unlike the A&L, its vote would not take place until next year.

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First Choice ousts chief exec at cost of £640,000

Patrick Tooher

Francis Baron was ousted yesterday as chief executive of First Choice Holidays, and will receive £640,000 in compensation under the terms of his service contract with the tour operator.

News of the pay-off, equivalent to two years' salary, is likely to cause consternation among institutional investors and reignite the "payment for failure" debate currently raging in corporate governance circles.

During Mr Baron's three-year tenure at the helm of First Choice, the share price more than halved, while in the year to October 1995 the company reported a £3.4m loss before exceptional items, having made profits of over £20m in the early Nineties.

First Choice blamed Mr Baron's sudden departure on a clash of personalities in the boardroom. "Unfortunately, his relationships with many of his key colleagues have become unworkable and in these circumstances the board felt the continued progress of the group would be compromised if Francis remained as group chief executive," said Michael Julian, the chairman.

Mr Baron, whose manage-

ment style was described by insiders as "authoritarian", responded: "It is a pity that these differences could not have been resolved, but there are some battles you can win and some you can't."

Peter Long, managing director of the group's UK tour operating division, will take over as group managing director.

While Ian Cubb, currently non-executive chairman, will assume a full executive role.

It is understood that matters came to a head at a board meeting last Friday when three directors - Mr Long, finance director David Gill, and Ken Smith, managing director of Air 2000, the in-house airline - insisted either Mr Baron went or they would resign en masse.

Mr Baron, who joined the group in 1993 when it was known as Owners Abroad, is credited with masterminding the company's revival and successfully re-branding exercise which propelled the company into third place as the UK's leading tour operator, behind Thomson and Airtours.

But profits nose-dived as holidaymakers, faced with rising levels of job insecurity, higher rates of personal taxation and a weak pound, stopped booking early or simply stayed at home.

Perhaps Mr Baron's biggest achievement was to secure a £4.4m rescue rights issue last year to fund expansion in Canada.

His departure raises the prospect of this year's dividend being cut. Mr Baron is known to have wanted to reward those investors who backed the company in the rights issue by maintaining the payout.

BAe scoops £480m order from Australia

British Aerospace has won its biggest single order worth an estimated A\$1bn (£480m) for its successful Hawk military training jet, writes Chris Godsmark.

The Australian Air Force has chosen BAe as the preferred candidate to replace its existing fleet of 87 Italian Aer Macchi trainers which have been in service for more than 25 years.

The new contract is for BAe to guarantee to provide a given amount of flying hours rather than planes, but the total number of Hawks likely to be supplied is believed to be around 35. The list price for the

plane is between £10m and £14m. BAe beat off competition from Aermacchi and McDonnell Douglas of the US.

The Hawks will be specially modified to match the cockpit design of the RAAF's fleet of McDonnell Douglas F18 fighters. The first planes will enter service by 2000, with several BAe staff likely to provide back-up service in Australia.

BAe said that the order would guarantee jobs for staff in Brough near Hull and Watton near Preston and a small number of extra jobs could be created.

Strong pound halves British Steel profit

Magnus Grimond

British Steel warned yesterday that further strengthening of the pound would force the group to speed up redundancy plans in an effort to maintain its competitiveness against European producers.

Unveiling more than halved interim profits yesterday, Sir Brian Moffat, chairman and chief executive, said the strengthening currency meant the group's cost competitiveness had been eroded while competitors had been advantaged. Efficiency measures already

planned would have to be accelerated to regain the competitive edge built up over the past two to three years.

"This will impact on all businesses. We are not talking about radical closures, but we are talking about improvements in productivity which are bound to impact on the employment situation," he said.

British Steel shed 500 staff in the first half. Officials said any further job losses would not be significantly in excess of the normal annual attrition demand, leading to sharp price falls. Stainless steel slumped 45 per cent to the

lowest price for a decade, but had since recovered between 5 and 8 per cent, with another increase.

The restocking phase has ended, with price increases across a broad range of products, "Sir Brian said. This pointed to cautious optimism for the period ahead, with British Steel expected to operate at full capacity and strong order books in the second half.

The main price rises had been seen in "value-added" lines. British Steel said, including coated galvanised sheets, stainless steel slumped 45 per cent to the

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STOCK MARKETS

FTSE 100

business

Regulatory cloud lifted from BAA

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY TOM STEVENSON

Sir John Egan, chief executive of BAA, was in upbeat mood at yesterday's presentation of interim results for Britain's dominant airports operator. With a relatively benign regulatory framework in place on airport landing charges, a big cloud has been removed from the group's horizon.

Sir John was also sounding confident about another issue that could act as a brake on the shares' progress – a Labour windfall tax on the privatised utilities. Sir John said he had received no word that BAA would be included in such a tax and analysts agree that with such a heavy capital expenditure programme, BAA is likely to escape.

That leaves only one potential problem – the possible end of duty-free shopping in Europe by 1999. Even here BAA is bullish, for if the concession is abolished BAA will be allowed to recoup some of the lost revenue by raising airport landing charges.

But far from bucking away from duty-free, BAA is expanding its interests. It is expanding its international business outside of Europe and over the weekend announced the formation of a new company, World Duty Free, to develop its duty-free operations around the world. BAA says the worldwide duty-free market is worth £21bn and has been growing at double-digit rates for the past few years. With a 5 per cent share of the market so far, BAA hopes to build that share or without the European business.

The company also announced plans over the weekend to take over a number of UK contracts with Nuance, the former Allders International business acquired by SwissAir earlier this year. All this accompanied decent figures for the six months to 30 September which contained few surprises. Pre-tax profits edged up by 3.4 per cent to £304m. This reflected an adjustment of £1m of airport charges which have been "re-phased" to the second half. On a like-for-like basis profits were 10.5 per cent ahead.

Passenger numbers at BAA's seven airports were up by 4.9 per cent to 8.7 million in October, although short-haul traffic in the summer was hit by a cut in capacity by the tour operators. Stansted performed strongly and made its debut first-half profit.

Much of BAA's promise lies in its retail operations which account for 44 per cent of revenue. Retail income per passenger rose by 7.2 per cent to £4.20, with perfume sales particularly strong. BAA is also starting to show its abilities beyond just being a landlord. It is developing new formats of its own, such as Whiskies of the World. forthcoming openings include Studio 55.

aimed at high-spending Japanese passengers. With analysts forecasting full-year profits of £435m, the shares, down 6p on 496p yesterday, trade on a forward rating of 15. Good value.

Sidlaw heads out of the woods

New management at Sidlaw is at last showing signs of leading the group out of the woods it got into when it paid over the odds for Courtaulds' flexible packaging operations in 1993. That £78m deal transformed Sidlaw from a minor Scottish mini-conglomerate into one of Europe's largest packaging companies and led management to make the fatal error of pursuing volume at a time when margins were being squeezed at both ends.

The old strategy contributed to losses which have deepened from £12,000 to £7.27m in the year to September. But since the October arrival of packaging man John Durston as chief executive, there are grounds for be-

lieving the worst may be over. Most immediately, the exceptional items which have scarred recent figures, rising from £7.38m to £8.23m in the latest period, should not recur and should lead to future benefits. Of the total last year, £5.34m related to the net costs of the sale or closure of underperforming parts of the packaging division.

But more important to the group's revival is the path being laid down by Mr Durston, whose room for manoeuvre has been vastly increased by September's £56m sale of the ASCO oil services business. At a stroke, that deal erases Sidlaw's former high gearing and throws up a £16.5m profit, allowing him to pursue his stated strategy of seeking higher margin business.

He sees scope for expansion in growing areas with high barriers to entry like individual chocolate biscuit wrappers.

Growth rates of 2.5-4 per cent may not sound much, but they are better than the flat or declining sales typical in traditional mainstays.

He has set himself the demanding target of raising margins to around 8 per cent over the next two to three years

from the low of 1.7 per cent hit in the second half of last year. But, boosted by hopes that in early 1997 he can push through the first price rises for four years, the omens for Sidlaw are better than they have been for a long time. Minimal profits of £2.5m for the full year would put the shares, unchanged at 106p, on a stratospheric multiple of 35. Reasonable value for those brave enough to back the man even so.

Prowling being squeezed

Interim results from Utbridge-based Prowling illustrate well the problems facing smaller housebuilders. In a rapidly consolidating sector, where greater size gives increasing economies of scale, only just being among the top two dozen of housebuilders is not an ideal position to be in.

Not even its location in southern England, where the housing market is relatively buoyant, has helped Prowling's cause. While the larger players such as Bellway and Westbury are reporting good profit and margin improvements, Prowling is going in the opposite direction.

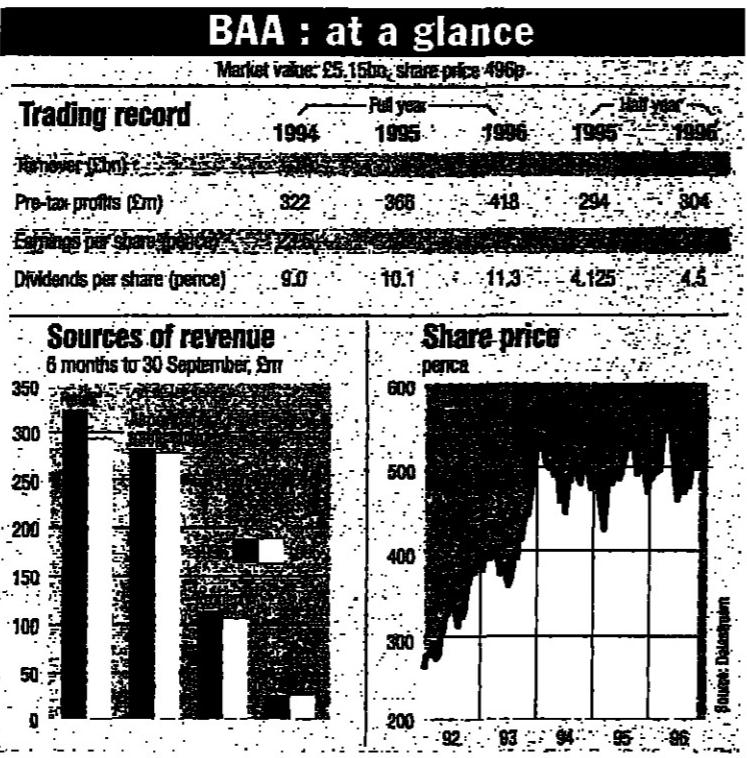
In the six months to August, the pre-tax number almost halved from £4.1m to £2.2m on sales 17 per cent higher at £59.2m. The maintained 1.9p dividend was uncovered by earnings per share of 1.6p (3.5p).

Prowling blamed an "extremely competitive" new homes market, where price increases have failed to match those secured in the second-hand market. Buyers still seem to have the upper hand and are driving a hard bargain, especially for new houses. As a result, margins remain under pressure, collapsing to 5.7 per cent from 11.3 per cent a year ago, even though the cost of part-exchange and other incentive schemes fell and the average selling price rose to almost £90,000 from £77,000, as more large houses in more expensive areas were built.

Prowling expects to complete 1,350 transactions this year, up from 1,217, but with the approach of a general election likely to lead to a house-buying hiatus and land prices registering annual increases of up to 50 per cent the outlook is less than promising.

House broker Pannure Gordon is sticking with its full year pre-tax forecast of £7.7m (£6m), implying a forward p/e ratio of 18 with the shares at 114p, down 1.5p.

That rating leaves little room for error. Unattractive.



Emap profit of £51m puts feud in back seat

Matthew Horsman
Media Editor

Emap, the media company in the throes of a boardroom bust-up, yesterday took a breather from its management misfortunes to announce sharply higher interim profits of £50.6m up 34 per cent.

The company also booked a pre-tax profit gain of £113.5m from the sale of its newspaper and printing businesses to Johnston Press, following a £217m deal completed earlier this year. Turnover was ahead 16 per cent at £388.3m.

Several media analysts upgraded their forecasts for the full year, pointing out that the newspaper sale had resulted in a lower tax charge than many had expected. Full-year forecasts range to as high as £1.18m, or 37p a share.

Insiders conceded that the results were a welcome diversion from a long-simmering boardroom dispute between two renegade independent directors, Joe Cooke and Ken Simmonds, who are to fight the board's plans to fire them at an extraordinary meeting on 2 December.

The company declined to provide further details yesterday of success plans, which have been widely aired in recent weeks. According to informed sources, Robin Miller, the chief executive, is likely to become non-executive chairman when Sir John Hoskyns stands down. Sir John told analysts yesterday that he was unlikely to do so before 1998.

Mr Miller and the managing director, David Arculus, have had several disagreements over strategy, but sources close to the company insisted last night they were not serious. Mr Arculus is expected to become chief executive if Mr Miller rises to the chairmanship.

The two renegade board di-



Robin Miller: Chief executive is likely to become non-executive chairman when Sir John Hoskyns steps down

rectors have sent letters to all shareholders asking for support against their dismissal. The two argue that the interests of good corporate governance require strong independent representation on the board. Their battle with management flared last summer, when they opposed proposals, approved by shareholders, to reduce the minimum number of board members and dispense with the need to consult shareholders if 75 per cent of board agreed to dismiss directors. Institutional shareholders are widely expected to support management, and agree to dismiss the two men.

The six-month period saw the first results from *Tele Star*, the French listing magazine, as well as sharply higher returns from commercial radio, following the purchase of the Metro Radio group. Radio profits breached £10m, up 85 per cent year-on-year.

Consumer magazines, one of the group's core businesses, saw operating profits rise 11 per cent to £19.3m, on turnover ahead 8 per cent at £15.6m.

Strong advertising growth in the UK, expected to continue into the second half, was the main driver of climbing profits. The French consumer magazine businesses, boosted by the *Tele Star* acquisition, saw profits soar by 108 per cent to £13.4m.

Diane Cowie

Venture capital and angel investors are looking for opportunities in the UK. A number of deals have been done recently, including the £100m deal between Vodafone and Orange. A number of deals have been done recently, including the £100m deal between Vodafone and Orange.

Resort Hotels boss in court

Shane Mulligan, the owner of the resort hotel chain, has been charged with串通 (conspiracy) and other offences. He faces trial in January.

Richard Eyre, Capital's chief executive, said the restaurants business would use "many of the skills we have developed in radio". He conceded the move had been unexpected, but claimed there were "obvious synergies between Capital's music and entertainment background and event restaurants".

He said the company intended to cross-promote the Capital Radio brand and the restaurants, which include the Chicago Pizza Pie Factory, Tacos and Beach Blanket Babylon.

Capital, owners of London's most successful commercial radio station, has underperformed the red-hot media sector in recent months, as the market awaited news of the company's strategy. The remaining commercial licences in the UK have been bid up to levels Mr Eyre said were unacceptable, while Capital was considered by many to be too big to be able to win new licences granted by the Radio Authority.

Analysts had been pushing the company to make acquisitions, with other media the favoured option. But Mr Eyre said yesterday: "I'm not sure it makes sense for us to invest in television, say. That market is all about programme making and programme acquisition – those are not our skills."

The acquisition won the support of several analysts yesterday. One said: "I think this is an intriguing move, and it makes sense to take the merchandising brand into new markets."

However, Capital's shares fell 16p to 577.5p on the news.

Capital and M&K had already entered into a joint venture to develop Capital Radio Café on the ground floor of the radio company's new offices in Leicester Square, London. Additional Radio Cafés are to be launched over the next 12 months.

Comment, page 19

East Midlands in formal takeover talks

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

Directors of East Midlands Electricity were last night preparing for formal discussions about a possible takeover strike for the company from Dominion Resources, the US utility group.

After days of detailed work on the bid by Dominion's board and advisers from SBC Warburg and US buyout specialists Wasserstein Perella, the Virginia-based power company approached East Midlands yesterday to arrange a meeting.

ttingham-based company, valuing it at £1.2bn. However East Midlands is likely to hold out for a price of at least some £650p a share, worth more than £1.3bn.

It was unclear last night whether Dominion was ready to make a formal offer on this scale. A source close to the company said: "There isn't a specific set of parameters at this stage."

There are three possible outcomes from the talks: an agreed takeover bid recommended by East Midlands' board to its shareholders; a hostile bid by Dominion after the failure of the two sides to agree on a price; or

the possibility that the US predator would decide not to bid.

Shares in East Midlands surged ahead yesterday, closing up 10p at 603.5p. The share price had been depressed last week by the growing belief among City analysts that a Dominion bid, already launched by US-controlled CE Electric, would be blocked by the Government. If both bids succeed, it would leave just three of the 12 privatised regional electricity companies remaining with separate stock market listings.

John Battle, Labour's energy spokesman, said he was not opposed to electricity takeovers by foreign firms but the regulator had to be certain he could continue to do his job.

Invesco in call for £119m to tie up AIM

Jill Treanor
Banking Correspondent

Invesco yesterday raised £119m via a rights issue to contribute towards the cost of the \$1.6bn (£1bn) merger with Texas-based AIM, a deal that will make it one of the world's largest fund management groups.

Most of the merger price will be satisfied by the issue of 290 million Invesco shares to shareholders in AIM. The remaining \$500m is being raised in cash from loans and yesterday's rights issue.

The rights issue will be made by Invesco Funding LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Invesco, on the basis of one unit of convertible unsecured loan stock in Invesco Funding for every 5 existing Invesco ordinary shares.

The units will be converted into new ordinary shares in Invesco provided that debt financing commitments have not been terminated.

The merged group, which will be renamed Aravisco, will control \$150m (£91m) of funds which values the 72 per cent of the mutual fund group held by AIM's founder directors and management at £720m.

Four top executives of AIM, including Ted Bauer, the 77-year-old founder, are to be locked in with four-year fixed-term contracts which will then convert to one-year rolling contracts.

Mr Bauer's stake in AIM is worth about £10m and he will end up with 5 per cent of the merged company.

In total seven of the AIM directors will together hold a 20 per cent stake in the merged company and they have agreed not to sell their stakes for five years.

The units will be converted into new ordinary shares in Invesco provided that debt financing commitments have not been terminated.

Cost of Lloyds bid set to jump for UniChem

Magnus Grindon

UniChem has revealed that its £641m bid for Lloyds Chemists would cost around £25.4m in fees and other charges. The figure, announced in the offer document sent to Lloyds shareholders over the weekend, covers £14m expected in underwriting fees for Lloyds earlier this year, plus the legal and administrative costs of dealing with the subsequent reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The additional £11.4m is an estimate of the further costs of advisers and stamp duty if the latest bid is successful.

UniChem reiterated its claim that the merger of the businesses would lead to "material earnings enhancement" after the first year. Lord Rippon, the chairman, said annual cost savings would run at over £15m in the first 12 months and in excess of £20m thereafter. The en-

larged group would create a UK leader in pharmacy retailing, the distribution of prescription drugs to independent chemists and the wholesaling of veterinary products.

But Gehe, which is mounting a rival £651m bid for Lloyds, countered that gearing would

solar to nearly 490 per cent if the two businesses were put together.

The figures were based on UniChem's average debt level of £123m for last year, a spokesman for the German group said, and were before estimated restructuring and certain bid costs.

That level of debt will leave the group vulnerable, he claimed.

"We think this is something to be questioned, particularly as at the time of the last rights issue in 1994 [Lloyds] said it wanted to cut gearing, then standing at 36 per cent."

However, in an immediate response, Jeffery Harris, the UniChem chief executive, said Gehe were trotting out all same old themes. "Contrary to all Gehe's earlier protestations of the diminishing value of Lloyds, their bid of £5 underscores the value we have put on the company. We are confident of delivering what stamp duty to shareholders from the acquisition."

Analysts had been pushing the company to make acquisitions, with other media the favoured option. But Mr Eyre said yesterday: "I'm not sure it makes sense for us to invest in television, say. That market is all about programme making and programme acquisition – those are not our skills."

The acquisition won the support of several analysts yesterday. One said: "I think this is an intriguing move, and it makes sense to take the merchandising brand into new markets."

However, Capital's shares fell 16p to 577.5p on the news.

Capital and M&K had already entered into a joint venture to develop Capital Radio Café on the ground floor of the radio company's new offices in Leicester Square, London. Additional Radio Cafés are to be launched over the next 12 months.

Shares dipped sharply on the grey market after yesterday's announcement, but they are still trading 10 per cent above the price investors have to pay.

In Bonn

Overwhelmed by a torrent of orders, the German telephone monopoly Deutsche Telekom announced yesterday that it was putting another 115 million shares on the market next week, raising the total to 690 million and boosting the amount of money raised by 20 per cent to as much as DM20.7bn (£8.4bn).

The company had planned to release 500 million shares, and



COMMENT

Convergence play leaves Britain out in the cold

Of the many bizarre trends in capital markets right now the strangest of all is the dramatic narrowing of the premium on Italian and Spanish bonds over those of Germany. To put it simply, what has been happening is that the cost of Italian and Spanish government debt has fallen to the extent that for the first time it has moved to within 2 percentage points of Germany's. Italy now pays less for its money than Britain. The same is also true of Ireland, Finland and Sweden. Given that Italy and Spain could until recently be characterised, from an economic perspective, not too far astray from banana république status, this would seem to be quite a turn-up for the books. But don't worry. It's only partly to do with economic fundamentals. We haven't been overtaken by Spain, Italy and Finland yet. Rather the reason is to do with EMU. Peripheral bond markets are rising strongly in anticipation of monetary union. If markets believe a country will join EMU, it seems reasonable to align their long term bond yields with those of the lowest denominator - Germany - since after EMU their inflation and currency rates should be the same. In markets, this is known as "the convergence play". The dangers for those who adopt this as an investment strategy are only too apparent. Even Deutsche Bank, which is about as strongly pro-EMU as they come, is warning that any setback in monetary union "could re-

sult in the undoing of recent market trends towards convergence and instead set off a flight to quality". For the moment, however, these dangers are being ignored. Bond prices in Italy and Spain keep moving upwards. Much tougher than expected Italian and Spanish budgets have reinforced the view that these countries are both serious about and capable of joining EMU, if not in the first wave, then certainly in the second.

In part, the convergence phenomenon in bond markets is self-fulfilling for the Maastricht Treaty makes it a condition of EMU membership that nominal long term interest rates converge to within 2 percentage points of the best performing member states. But it is also a reflection of political and economic reality. Because France in particular, and Germany to a limited extent, are also fudging the Maastricht conditions as they race towards monetary union, they cannot be as high minded as in the past about the cheating ways of others. The idea of Spain and Italy as early participants in monetary union is as a consequence less of an anathema to Germany than it was. A more relaxed stance on the fudge, together with some real progress on economic convergence, make it highly possible that Spain and Italy will gain entry at an early stage. Britain's position in all this is a mirror image of that of the Southern Europeans. While its politicians continue to talk the language

of the Euro-sceptic, there's little chance of the gilt market getting swept up in the convergence phenomenon - much to the anguish of the Treasury, for according to a recent report by IBCA, the debt rating agency, the beneficial effects on the cost of Government borrowing could be worth as much as 2p off the basic rate of income tax. The economics argue forcibly against it too. On present Treasury forecasts, Britain is not going to meet the 3 per cent Maastricht ceiling on debt as a proportion of GDP next year. If the Bank of England is right in what it said last week about inflation, Britain may not meet the inflation criteria either. So although these trends in international bond markets seem hard to understand from a British perspective, even bizarre, there is a modicum of logic behind them. Britain's wait and see stance on EMU may ultimately prove to have been the right one, but boy is it going to cost us if it turns out to have been wrong.

Capital turns to food

Capital Radio needed to do something to break out of the present hiatus in its development. But whether things are desperate enough to justify going out and buying a chain of theme restaurants is another thing. It smacks of management that

cannot think of anything better to do. We have heard the "synergy" arguments before. Capital is a strong marketing brand. So it should be able to provide ambience, good music, pleasant surroundings and thematic food as well, surely. That was Richard Eyre's argument yesterday, as he unveiled the £3m acquisition of My Kinda Town. There are some sound arguments in favour of the restaurant trade. Britons still eat out less than their counterparts in big Western countries. Moreover, there are signs yet that the phenomenal growth in spending on out-of-home meals in recent years is abating. But this is not a simple business: tastes change, trends come and go. Furthermore, Capital is buying into one of the trendiest business sectors in town, and paying the consequent top price for the privilege. To be fair, Mr Eyre had to do something. The City was breathing down his neck, wondering, urging him on to bid or not bid for. Unfortunately, this investment isn't going to convince anyone; are those who think Capital Their Kinda Radio Station going to turn to Mr Eyre for Their Kinda Pizza? It looks doubtful.

Harrogate and the single currency

Harrogate's outlandish and expensive conference centre has, despite its size,

always encouraged a feeling of claustrophobia and when hundreds of company executives are stuffed together into its confined spaces and maze of walkways, it is no surprise that tempers get a little frayed. Little more than eight hours into what was fast turning into a political circus yesterday the delegates could be forgiven for feeling like soft toys pulled around by a pack of ravenous terrors. Michael Portillo, Michael Heseltine, Gordon Brown - the CBI conference this year seems more like political hustings than a business conference.

The overwhelming impression was of any attempt at serious and much needed commercial discussion put on hold until after the election. One frustrated delegate who will remain nameless summed the proceedings up thus: "Most CBI people would rather politicians said what they stand for than use the conference to slag off their opponents."

Others complained of inability to plan when so many of the important decisions have yet to be taken.

On the single currency, for example, both main parties are undecided. Not that this does any more than reflect deep divisions within the CBI's own membership. The CBI itself is sitting on the fence on this vital issue for fear of being engulfed by a tidal wave of political flak. With that kind of leadership, it is no wonder many businesses feel rudderless.

Higher rates fears as raw materials costs jump

Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

A jump in the cost of raw materials last month due to higher oil prices left the financial markets on edge about the risk of another increase in interest rates. Although underlying inflation at the factory gate remained, at its lowest for 29 years, yesterday's figures were not quite as favourable as expected.

Inflation figures due on Thursday are expected to show that the target measure climbed above 3 per cent last month, pushed higher by petrol prices. By last night's close the financial markets were betting that base rates will be a full percentage point higher at 7 per cent by June.

The latest survey of the high-



street by the British Retail Consortium, published this morning, will provide some reassurance about inflation prospects. It shows that retail sales growth picked up in October, but the BRC said it did not add up to a runaway boom.

Andrew Higginson, chairman of the economic affairs committee, said: "Whilst re-

tailers are encouraged by this good performance, there is no sign of the 1980s-style boom that some commentators are talking up."

The prices manufacturers paid for raw materials and fuel rose by 0.5 per cent in October. It took the year-on-year rate of decline up to minus 2 per cent. The increase during the month was entirely due to rising crude oil prices, which were 45 per cent higher than a year earlier.

This also helped take prices charged at the factory gate up by 0.2 per cent during the month, although there were smaller increases in the prices of tobacco, textiles, chemicals, and a range of machinery and equipment. The annual rate of

output price inflation edged up to 2.3 per cent.

Even so, "core" producer output prices, excluding food, drink, tobacco and energy, rose by only 0.9 per cent in the 12 months to October, matching the previous month's low.

The fact that the oil price was mainly to blame for last month's increases reassured some analysts. "Inflationary pressures are otherwise very weak," said Simon Briscoe at BZW.

The BZW's survey, published in advance of official figures, showed that retail sales grew 5.9

per cent in value in the year to

October. This was higher than September's 5.2 per cent but a shade under the August-October average of 6 per cent.

The report said there had been an encouraging start to Christmas trading. Sales growth remained strong in areas related to the housing market, especially furniture and carpets where gains were described as "excellent". Sales of personal computers were also stellar.

Separate figures on the number of insolvencies from accountancy firm Deloitte & Touche showed that this year looks likely to see the lowest number of appointments to receiverships and administration orders since 1989.

The total in the 10 months to October was 1,387, compared with 2,013 in all of 1995, and 1,507 in 1989.

Some of Albion's assets may

Maxted heads enlarged Chesterfield group

Nigel Cope

Robert Maxted emerged as head of Chesterfield Properties yesterday when the company paid £21.9m for Albion, his privately held property company and installed him as chief executive of the enlarged group.

The deal does not represent a large windfall gain for Mr Maxted who built up Pilar Properties, as he owns just 3 per cent of the company. The bulk of the shares are held by Legal & General, Burford Holdings and Mercury Asset Management.

Roger Wingate, whose father founded Chesterfield, will remain as executive chairman. There is widespread speculation that Mr Maxted's arrival signals a shake-up of Chesterfield's assets which include the Curzon chain of London cinemas and several West End theatres including Wyndhams.

Some of Albion's assets may

also be sold. Mr Maxted said: "The property market has segment into those companies that are active players and those that are not due to balance sheet constraints. This deal gives Albion access to the capital markets. The strategy is to become more opportunistic."

It is likely that new develop-



Staying on: Roger Wingate is executive chairman

ments will form part of the strategy. Albion, which was founded a year ago today, has a property portfolio valued at £110m, including 28 properties such as Tricon House, an office development in Birmingham. Its net annual income is £11.4m.

Chesterfield is paying for the acquisition through the issue of 4 million new shares at 545p and 2 million warrants at a subscription price of 700p.

Mr Maxted's arrival at Chesterfield is certain to herald a new era of dynamism at Chesterfield which has been regarded as a sleepy player with £300m of assets. The news was greeted positively in the City where Chesterfield shares soared 41.5p to 544p.

Now 49, Mr Maxted first came to prominence in the 1980s when he was a director of Speyhawk. He was later instrumental in building a £350m portfolio for Pilar Properties which went public in 1994.

Resort Hotels boss in court

Shareholders of the mainly three-star Resort Hotels group were "misled" into parting with £20.6m because of the forgeries and false statements by Robert Feld, the company's chief executive, a jury heard yesterday.

"Within about two years the company was in receivership and the shares were valueless," said Mr Anthony Evans QC, prosecuting at Middlesex Crown Court.

Mr Feld, 43, of Aubrey House, The Green, Rottingdean, East Sussex, denies three charges of making misleading statements to shareholders and 13 of using false instruments in 1992.

Mr Feld went into the family business, which ran the Norfolk Hotel on Brighton's seafront, after leaving university. He later formed Norfolk Resort Hotels which acquired the business and assets of the family partnership and of another business he and his sister had started in 1980, he court heard.

He changed the company's name to Resort Hotels in 1985 and the business was quickly expanded, partly by managing hotels for other companies in return for a fee. The group went public in 1988 and continued its expansion programme with the help of millions of pounds raised by substantial bank loans, the issue of debenture loan stock and by rights issues.

Eventually it had 55 properties, 3,000 hotel rooms and employed 600 staff.

"Robert Feld was the driving force behind the business," said Mr Evans. "He was Resort Hotels."

The lies and forgeries he allegedly told were in respect of a £20.6m rights issue in 1992. Shareholders were induced to part with £20.6m, Mr Evans said.

The rights was the fourth in as many years. Including the issue of some debentures in 1991, the company raised in excess of £50m.

The hearing was adjourned until today.



"How can such a business afford to pay more when it is at an absolute maximum of negative cashflow?" Earlier reports had suggested that BAA might have to pay up to £250m under Labour's plans. Sir John was speaking as BAA reported a 3.4 per cent increase in half-year pre-tax profits to £304m. Passenger traffic rose by 3.3 per cent in the period. Photograph: Philip Meech

G10 woos emerging countries

Jill Treanor
Banking Correspondent

Central bankers from the leading industrial countries will meet regularly with their counterparts in emerging countries to increase co-operation and establish standards for banking supervision world-wide.

The decision was confirmed yesterday at a regular monthly meeting of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) of the Group of Ten (G10) central bankers in Basle, Switzerland. It follows months of discussions about how to strengthen banking systems in emerging countries following Mexico's financial crisis in late 1994.

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The hearing was adjourned until today.

It's an important move. We are reaching out to world-wide supervisors to get effective supervision," a source at the BIS said.

Earlier this year the BIS decided to extend membership to the central banks of nine countries: Brazil, China, Hong Kong, India, Korea, Mexico, Saudi Arabia and Singapore. The decision is part of a broader move by international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to give a greater say to the world's new economic powers.

Hans Tietmeyer, chairman of the G10 central bank governors' committee and president of the Bundesbank, said after the



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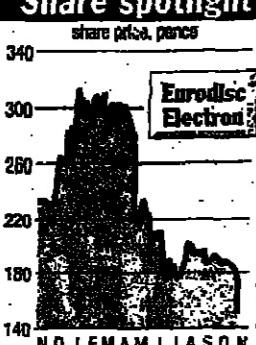
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market report / shares

Data Bank

FTSE 100	3914.4 + 3.6
FTSE 250	4395.8 + 0.2
FTSE 350	1954.9 + 1.5
SEAQ VOLUME	492.8m. shares, 36324 bargains
Gilt's Index	93.73 - 0.01

Share spotlight



Allied Domecq in shape to retain Cinderella rating

Allied Domecq's surprising decision to keep its shape caught the stock market on the hop. The shares slumped 16.5p to 468p, the worst performance of any blue chip, as the weekend guidance that new chairman Sir Christopher Hogg had decided to stick with his inheritance and not indulge in a demerger took its inevitable toll.

The market had been convinced that struggling Allied, a long time underperformer, would split itself into two – retailing and spirits. But Sir Christopher, who divided Courtaulds into two stand-alone companies, has, it seems, decided to stay with Allied's sprawling mixture of interests.

The drinks group is due to announce its results today. They will be poor. Unless there is a positive trading statement the shares are likely to head back towards the 42p low hit in August.

Yet another round of Allied's

misfortune is something the market has learned to accommodate with the shares for long regarded as the Cinderella of the drinks industry.

The market had an uncertain session, managing on the back of New York, to close with a modest plus up 3.6 points at 3,914.4. Turnover was again thin with few investors prepared to chance their arm.

East Midlands Electricity achieved a 10p gain to 603.5p although the signalled strike from Dominion Resources failed to materialise. CMS, another US group, still lurks and there is talk Dominion is trying to play a waiting game with its rumoured US rival.

Europac Electronic, an electronic components distributor, fell to a new low, off 16p at 154p. Earlier this year the shares topped 300p with talk of a bid of around 360p a share. The group is the victim of a change of mind by Elek-

trown, the big Swiss group. It merged its electronics business with the old Electronic House and emerged as a 42 per cent shareholder in the combined group, Europac ElektroWatt. It was seen – and managed to give the impression – it was a long-term shareholder.

Then came the change of direction. The Swiss said they intended to sell their stake to the highest bidder to help pay for their takeover of Landis & Gyr, an electronics business.

There was, however, no rush to buy and ElektroWatt, through UBS, had to resort to an institutional placing at 220p to unload its shares. Since then Europac has warned of

difficult trading conditions. Galaness firmed 1.5p to 437p. NatWest Securities is puzzled by the shares' big discount to the market – a reversal of the rating of five years ago. The securities house think the price should be 10 per cent higher.

My Kinda Town, the restaurants group, gained 20p to 187p as Capital Radio emerged as the bidder. The media group's surprising new wavelength left its shares 16p off at 577.5p.

Chelsea Village the football club, remained in the takeover tunnel, up 12p at 117.5p. Newcomer Majestic Wine, a drinks warehouse chain, enjoyed a

heady ferment, stretching to 204.5p from its 160p placing. Scottish Highland Hotels was slightly more inhibited, gaining 12.5p to 137.5p.

Railtrack steamed ahead 13p to 289p ahead of profits figures on Friday. A 74 per cent surge to £135m is expected. The controversial share sale has so far been a runaway success for the army of Sids which alighted on the last big privatisation exercise of the present Government. Talk of huge property assets and intriguing plans to exploit these riches have helped drive the shares from a springtime 190p flotation price.

Bellway, the builder which raised £16m through a placing on Friday at 423.5p, held at 342.5p. Stockbroker Charterhouse Tilney has nudged this year's profit forecast higher to £37.5m and is shooting for £44m next year.

The shares, it says, are "one

of the safest and most attractive in the sector".

Blue Circle Industries added 8p to 386.5p as analysts examined its US operations and Wolesey rose 9.5p to 455p on HSBC James Capel support. Aviva Petroleum gained 8p to 40.5p with some speculators pondering the possibility of a bid for United Energy, unchanged at 16p.

Romford, the electrical components group which fused on Friday after another profit warning, managed a modest rally, up 12p to 135p, on director buying.

Chesterfield, the property group gained 41.5p to 544p as Robert Marted's property interests were reversed into the company and Mr Marted emerged as chief executive. He is expected to sell Chesterfield's London West End estates. Greycourt rose 5p to 154p as it resisted a bid from Moorfield Estates.

TAKING STOCK

■ Paramount, the pub chain, hovers at 6.5p. There is talk of a cash call to help finance a takeover with the 50 per cent shareholding in its joint pub venture, Real Inns, a likely target. Nomura, the Japanese investment house, sits on 7.5p per cent and other shareholders include Bass.

■ Stockbroker Teather & Greenwood like Flare, the ceramics group. Profits of £3.1m are expected this year with £5.1m next. The shares are 155p.

■ Cambridge Mineral Resources, seeking precious gems, expects to move from Oxf to AIM early next year. It has raised £200,000 through a placing with an unidentified investor. Tests at the company's Swedish site have confirmed the presence of diamond indicator minerals.

MARKET REPORT

DEREK PAIN

stock market reporter of the year

Index	Low	High	Price	Chg	Yld	P/CFPS	Index	Low	High	Price	Chg	Yld	P/CFPS	Index	Low	High	Price	Chg	Yld	P/CFPS
Alcoholic Beverages	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Banks, Merchant	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000
Banks, Retail	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000
Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000
Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000
Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000
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Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000
Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000
Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000
Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000
Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000
Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,000	Breweries, Pubs & Rest.	1,000	1,000	1,000	-10	0.00	1,00							

Call it wacky, but sterling is on target for a classic market error

Everyone knows that markets make mistakes. You can always see that after the inevitable correction and wonder how people could have allowed themselves to be drawn into such a trap. More fun, though, is judging when a mistake is taking place, having the courage to say that this or that market response must be wrong.

The current narrowing of spreads in European government bonds – with, for example, a rapid sudden fall in long-term Italian interest rates – is a good example of market error, as the Commonwealth Column in this section has the courage to say that this or that market response must be wrong.

The current narrowing of

the implications of the stronger pound on UK monetary policy. It is an interesting thesis and deserves a wider audience. The central point is that the Bank of England may be underestimating this effect in its concern about inflation. The chart puts together the exchange rate and the interest rate impact on monetary policy. The exchange rate effect is converted on the Treasury's four-to-one rule of thumb, where a 4 per cent rise (or fall) in the exchange rate is deemed equal to a 1 per cent rise or fall in base rates.

You can see that whereas during the spring a lower exchange rate was reinforcing the lax interest rate stance, by mid-summer this was much less marked, and about a month before the rise in base rates the exchange rate began seriously to tighten the monetary stance. The effect of that last-quarter-point on base rates is dwarfed by the rise in sterling which is equivalent to a one-and-a-half point rise in interest rates.

But most fun of all is spotting the market error that is about to happen: the sudden swing of fashion that pushes a currency, or a set of securities, to an extreme level, and which is subsequently unwound. Here is one current candidate, a market error that has not yet happened but which may well happen in the next few months.

It concerns sterling. It is now clear that the weakness of the pound over the last year was an error, but what about its current strength? And what about the coming sterling boom?

You hadn't heard about the coming sterling boom, but it is an interesting potential phenomenon for the next 18 months. There has been a change in tone in the perception of the pound in the last few weeks. Whereas it was generally to be assumed to be a chronically weak currency – a long-term sell, even if in the short term profits could be made by holding it – now it was beginning to be seen as an ordinary currency, not particularly strong, but not inherently weak. Kleinwort Benson Securities noted in a recent circular that it detected a change in the perception of its overseas customers: sterling was no longer seen as a weak currency.

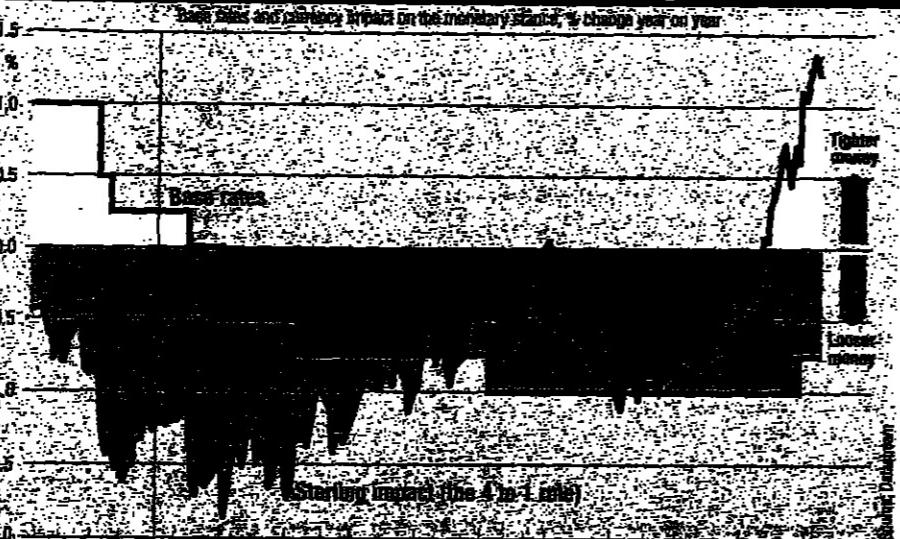
The same paper also noted



Hamish McRae

I think there is a serious danger that the pound will become too strong in a couple of years, not too weak. If that happens remember where you read this first

UK monetary policy - how tight



Value calculated at local rates

the pound's strength will continue. These include the fact that it is undervalued against the mark; it may benefit further if the recovery of oil prices continues; and it may be boosted by EMU-related speculation (of which more in a moment).

At any rate, the KB team suggests rates of DM 2.55 and \$1.70 next year, and suggests that this will take place without the need for as sharp a rise in base rates as markets expect: 6.5 per cent by end-1997 rather than an indicated market expectation of 7.25 per cent.

All very interesting, and I for one, find it very convincing. But let's go one stage further and look at the dynamics of this stronger sterling. Next year a stronger pound will come at a time when the economy is growing fast, faster than any of the other European countries. It will come at a time of considerable political unrest, partly brought about by efforts to meet the Maastricht convergence criteria. There may at some stage in the next 18 months be an unravelling of the whole Maastricht process, if for example, the elimination of the mark is rejected by the Ger-

man parliament, or if unemployment across the Continent continues to climb.

It is not politically correct at the present time to suggest that the plan will fail to pieces, but it would be absurd to reject the possibility.

At the moment, the main argument that gilts may very well rise is on grounds of convergence: we might make up the leeway against the "hard" European currencies if there is even an outside possibility of participation in the Euro at stage one.

But there is another, entirely opposite possibility: that yields will converge because it becomes clear that either EMU will not happen, or if it does, the euro will be a chronically weak currency.

Britain, for its part, will have a new government, with a new popular mandate. It is difficult to see any set of circumstances where the new government will be weaker than the present one, and if it is a major Labour government, there will be great pressure to be seen to be "correct" on the currency front. (Memories of the devaluation of 1967 and the IMF rescue of 1976 linger in the markets' sub-conscious.)

On balance, a Labour government will be more concerned to avoid a fall in the value of sterling than a Tory one.

Put all this together and there is a makings of a market error: pushing the pound up too far.

If you said that to people nine months ago it would have seemed ridiculous. Now it simple seems a bit whacky, probably wrong, but given the startling (and largely unpredicted) recovery in the pound, at least conceivable. But whacky ideas have a way of becoming accepted wisdom.

I think there is a serious danger that sterling will become too strong in a couple of years' time, not too weak. If that happens, remember where you read it first.

RSA redefines work without its director

PEOPLE & BUSINESS



Sour taste: Pru Leith and Peter Cowling 'did not get on'

You may know that the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, better known as the RSA, is chaired by Pru Leith, the famous upmarket caterer.

What was certainly news to me is that Peter Cowling, the RSA's director for just over a year, has just resigned "to pursue other business opportunities".

James Sandison, the RSA's director of finance, has stepped into the breach as acting director.

Sources close to the RSA's John Adam Street offices, off the Strand in London, say the ousted Mr Cowling is in line for a £200,000 pay-off.

Apparently the redoubtable Ms Leith and Mr Cowling did

not gel too well.

A spokeswoman for the RSA insists the parting of the ways has been entirely amicable. As for any pay-off, she says: "I don't know about that."

The RSA has run a number of high-profile campaigns aimed at business, including last year's Tomorrow's Company project. It will launch a new campaign in the spring titled Redefining Work – but without Mr Cowling.

On balance, a Labour government will be more concerned to avoid a fall in the value of sterling than a Tory one.

Put all this together and there is a makings of a market error: pushing the pound up too far.

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made available to the relevant authorities."

Rumours that Mr Cicuti has been moved to a safe house in Palermo have not been confirmed.

The Prudential stunned the City yesterday by poaching Nick Mustoe, a mere striping aged 34, to head up UK equities at Prudential Portfolio Managers, one of the world's biggest investment managers with more than £28bn under management.

Mr Mustoe has been poised away from PDM, the successful pension fund specialists, where he has been responsible for a piddling £3.7bn for the past 11 years. At PPM, Mr Mustoe's piggy bank will bulge to £3.2bn.

City dealing rooms interpret this as the Pru's most aggressive attempt yet to shake off its fusty old image and promote young Turks.

At the BBC's gala dinner last week, celebrating 60 years of glorious television, the Granada table was right next to the Yorkshire Tyne Tees table.

Purely coincidentally, Granada is stalking YTV. Anyway, at a suitable pause during the festivities, Charles Allen, Granada's chief executive, goes over to Ward Thomas, head of YTV, and shakes him by the hand.

Seeing this, Granada's chairman, Gerry Robinson, leaps to his feet and does the same. Mr Robinson then leans down to the seated Mr Thomas and murmurs: "I really shouldn't be seen talking to you. Every time we're seen in public together your share price jumps up again."

More than 200 CBI delegates at the CBI conference in Harrogate had a special treat last night – fish 'n' chips opera.

The "gala" supper in Guiseley near Leeds was held at the original Harry Ramsden's fish and chip shop, the first of a large chain of shops.

Singers from Opera North circulated the tables, serenading the lucky plutocrats.

The menu consisted of fish and chips of course, "with generous helpings of mushy peas – if the delegates' constitutions were up to it," a spokesman said.

No week is complete without at least one good rumour about Tom Rublython, founder and editor of Sunday Business. The latest is that Mr Rublython is to run as an independent MP at the next general election.

"Where would I find the time?" guffawed our hero. But he does not rule it out.

John Willcock

Foreign Exchange Rates

	Dollar			D-Mark		
Country	Spot	1 month	3 months	Spot	1 month	3 months
US	1.6447	1.6210	1.6333	1.0000	0.9851	0.9861
Canada	2.1889	2.1454	2.1561	1.3000	1.2423	1.2485
Germany	2.4765	2.4553	2.4644	1.6500	1.6028	1.6047
France	3.3775	3.3733	3.3825	2.0000	1.9811	1.9821
Italy	2.0418	2.0142	2.0221	1.6700	1.6511	1.6521
Japan	1.8347	1.8149	1.8247	1.2765	1.2578	1.2591
ECU	1.2945	1.2816	1.2836	0.8723	0.8671	0.8681
Belgium	5.0707	5.1010	5.1236	3.1029	3.1221	3.1241
Netherlands	5.2303	5.2277	5.2365	3.2475	3.2501	3.2521
Denmark	2.7784	2.7656	2.7825	1.8126	1.8126	1.8126
Ireland	0.9957	1.0110	1.0162	0.6426	0.6426	0.6426
Norway	1.0407	1.0540	1.0630	0.6277	0.6255	0.6275
Spain	2.0823	2.0810	2.0830	1.3678	1.3650	1.3681
Sweden	1.0821	1.0840	1.0870	0.6281	0.6281	0.6281
Australia	2.0971	2.0971	2.0971	1.2765	1.2765	1.2765
Hong Kong	1.2718	1.2652	1.2693	0.8085	0.8085	0.8085
Malaysia	4.4149	4.4040	4.4263	2.9263	2.9263	2.9263
New Zealand	2.3180	2.4711	2.5058	1.4003	1.4003	1.4003
Saudi Arabia	6.0881	6.0300	6.0750	4.2905	4.2905	4.2905
Singapore	2.3031	2.3031	2.3031	1.4003	1.4003	1.4003

Interest Rates

Country	800% Bank Rate	500% Discount	250% Bank Rate	US Prime Rate	87.5% Bank Rate	50% Bank Rate
UK	16.447	15.10	14.36	10.000	9.851	9.743
Canada	12.999	12.54	12.54	10.000	9.851	9.743
Germany	2.4765	1.95	1.95	10.000	9.851	9.743
France	3.3775	2.95	2.95	10.000	9.851	9.743
Italy	2.0418	1.81	1.81	10.000	9.851	9.743
Japan	1.8347	1.61	1.61	10.000	9.851	9.743
ECU	1.2945	1.28	1.28	10.000	9.851	9.743
Belgium	5.0707	4.75	4.75	10.000	9.851	9.743
Netherlands	5.2303	4.85	4.85	10.000	9.851	9.743
Denmark	2.7784	2.45	2.45	10.000	9.851	9.743
Ireland	0.9957	0.95	0.95	10.000	9.851	9.743
Norway	1.0407	1.00	1.00	10.000	9.851	9.743
Spain	2.0823	1.85	1.85	10.000	9.851	9.743
Sweden	1.0821	1.05	1.05	10.000	9.851	9.743
Australia	2.0971	1.95	1.95	10.000</		

BUSINESS TRAVEL

Tips on how to Lounge around

Ask business travellers waiting in a crowded departure lounge at Heathrow what has been the most irritating change in recent years, and many will mention the changes to eligibility rules for British Airways' Executive Club. The airline decided that frequent travellers who use cheaper tickets should no longer qualify for Silver and Gold levels, and so lose access to airport lounges; that's why many business travellers find themselves stuck with the crowds.

Yet rather than sitting and fuming in the shopping mall that passes for an airport lounge these days, there are solutions to the unwelcome new status of an unwelcome passenger. Airport lounges are opening up on a pay-per-visit basis, and at London's main airports a nominal investment will buy you a little quiet solitude before the flight – even if you are travelling on a charter flight.

One particularly accessible such lounge is at the south terminal at Gatwick. Wedged between gates 12 and 14 is the Premier Lounge, operated by Air Navigation Services. For £10, including VAT, travellers can relax in a compact but comfortable lounge which has everything from fax facilities to a good view of the runway. It opens daily between 6am and 10pm.

If full-farepaying passengers in the Servisair Lounges at Gatwick have noticed a few more customers than usual, it might be that they are holiday-makers heading for the sun. The Sovereign brochure from First Choice offers package tourists welcome respite in the lounge for a fee of around £12. Since check-in times for charter flights are typically two hours ahead of departure, there is plenty of time to enjoy the free facilities.

Premier Lounge, Gatwick: 01293 568306. Heathrow Business Centre: 081-759 2434.

A week ago, British Airways had a 'Bad' Air Day across the Atlantic. Not the baggage handling dispute that left at least 4,000 items of luggage at Heathrow Terminal 4 rather than accompanying their owners, nor intense lobbying against its proposed link with American Airlines. Instead, it was an engine problem with an eastbound Concord that caused embarrassment for BA staff. Yet the episode served to underline how much the airline industry is driven by the need to cater for business travellers these days.

Pressure on space at Heathrow means the budget business traveller's task at Britain's busiest airport is tougher. Best advice for passengers is to arrive and depart by air, thus making use of the "Comfort and Care" level at Heathrow's giant new Flight Connections Centre. It has an inner sanctum – the Rest and Relaxation area – and is operated by Thomas Cook. For a nominal sum, you can shower, snooze or study in calm.

For Heathrow-originating passengers, Thomas Cook also operates a business centre in the Queen's Building.

For an annual corporate fee of £495 you can qualify for reduced-price facilities at the centre, plus use of a lounge. This could be good news for travellers using terminals one and two, because the centre is placed neatly between them (though inconveniently "landside" rather than after security and passport control).

The economy class passenger who finds him or herself flying on Swissair will look forward to the transfer at Zurich, too. The Swiss carrier invites economy passengers to visit the airport lounge for a "nominal" sum (though given the strength of the local currency, this could still dent your wallet). It is to be hoped that more airlines will acknowledge that business travellers use economy tickets, too, and appreciate the peace and productive potential that only an executive lounge can offer.

The American Express index of air fares shows the cost of business class flights increasing significantly in the third quarter of 1996 – an inevitable phenomenon as airlines seek to capitalise on higher demand to compensate for a succession of dismal years.

Yet suppliers are not getting away with simply racking up prices. In an intensely competitive market, any serious enterprise has to offer value-for-money. This may be represented by a genuinely 24-hour service from a business travel agent in return for a negotiated contract fee. Or it could be provided by a hotel room that is properly equipped to meet the demands of an executive who does not possess a degree in electronic engineering and a soldering iron – but does need to contact head office digitally.

Anyone caught in the commercial uncertainties of the late 1990s hesitates to quote Harold Macmillan's "You've

never had it so good". Yet as far as the business traveller is concerned, there is a substantial amount of truth in the saying. As the round of improvements in intercontinental air travel draws to a close, executives are stretching their legs to take advantage of the 50-60 inches of seat pitch that have become the norm in business class, before waking up with a hot shower in the arrivals lounge and then heading for the free limousine transfer.

Now the battle has begun on short-haul routes. A dozen European airlines are busily expanding comfort and reducing hassle for premium passengers on short hops – not least because increasingly many city pairs have an alternative high-speed rail link. Under Richard Branson's sphere of influence, Eurostar is making

serious moves for meeting the business traveller's needs rather than merely waiting for customers to show up. But the news last week that overnight services from provincial cities to the Continent have been postponed for yet another year gives the airlines another chance to create a winning route network from airports outside London.

There is no significant evidence so far that executives in Exeter or Edinburgh are taking advantage of telecommuting to avoid travelling altogether. Indeed, information technology seems to have more of a role as a tool of the traveller – enabling easy contact with base – than as a reason to stay home. Leading business travel agencies say they predicted this all along, and point to the example of the telephone. When this instrument of communication was invented, it actually stimulated travel.

Some comfort, then, for travel agents under pressure from suppliers wanting to cut commissions and clients who want to book direct and make the most of electronic distribution system. No-one expects the next few years to be easy for agents, but the winners are likely to be those who turn these threats into opportunities – negotiating "management fees" arrangements that make commission levels irrelevant, and putting customers online to a database of deals that reflect the agent's buying muscle.

If the business travel industry can perceive a dark cloud, it is probably the one hovering over Luton. As thousands of executives have found in the past year,

Diamond Jewels



Photograph: Emma Boam

'A nominal investment will buy you a little quiet solitude before the flight'

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Continental give you a choice of 20 flights, offering our BusinessFirst service, from London Gatwick and Manchester every week. All landing at New York/Newark, the most modern and convenient airport for the centre of Manhattan. And you'll enjoy a complimentary limousine transfer to your hotel or office*. Contact your travel agent or Continental on 0800 747800. www.flycontinental.com

*Certain conditions apply to complimentary limousines. For full details call Continental.

Continental Airlines

Merger will not stifle competition

What would a BA/AA tie-up mean for New York travellers? Richard Quest reports

This week British Airways begins a new offer on the East coast of America weekend Breaks to Britain for just \$289. At prevailing exchange rates that is around £176. A first class sleeper return to Glasgow on British Rail costs £226. Why is BA offering such generosity? Because it is in hot competition for business across the Atlantic, and the principal competitor is American Airlines. Ask your travel agent to book you from London to New York and you will probably end up on aircraft of one or the other. End up, because out of an average 23 daily flights between the cities six airports 13 are run by British Airways or American.

Both in the morning and at night between them they depart half an hour apart. In competition with each other they have effectively built a transatlantic Shuttle service. In terms of westbound traffic from London, it means throughout the working day there's always one or other ready to leave. And that does not include the others on the route: a collection of airlines who have to resort on more than frequency to attract custom.

Virgin relies on service and gimmicks like seat back video as, limousines for Upper Class and a generous frequent flier programme. United Airlines and Continental concentrate on the bulk of US customers and those flying onto other destinations using New York.



When worlds collide: The British Airways and American Airlines merger is not unfettered

Alliance needs the utmost scrutiny.

An unfettered merger would clearly be a traveller's nightmare. Luckily that is not what is being proposed. The offer instead is Open Skies. Heathrow, the airport preferred by 80 per cent of customers, would be opened up to all comers. Slots could be bought and sold. All and sundry could fly from Britain to America. But

opening up LHR will require a great deal of care.

You do not sweep away decades of Treaty regulation overnight – not if you want to create true competition. For the authorities in Washington, London and Brussels now looking at the Alliance the trick is to ensure true competition is not stifled by the creation of a new BA – Behemoth Airlines.

American Airlines is a master

at running extra 767 flights to mop up any demand undercutting off other business. So any restrictions probably involve slot confiscation at Heathrow for BA – another hotly contested issue, but one that is probably the price the airline will have to pay to tie up with American.

As the new market opens up encouraging nascent competition will be paramount. It will be the equivalent of holding the tiger by the tail while the prey grows up. Already Continental has filed to fly six times a day to Heathrow. Virgin waits with its wings. The answer seems to be grant these requests and give BA/AA Alliance real heavyweight competition. Nonstop flights like El Al's narrow-bodied 757 from Stansted to Newark every Friday. No business traveller would willingly choose that.

Instead, the executive should hope that more carriers are encouraged to cross the Atlantic to Heathrow, pick up passengers, and fly them to third country destinations (another hotly contested issue). Flying the Atlantic promises to become more important, not less. If BA wishes to team up with American and believes that is necessary to compete in global markets then the price must be high because of the enormous resources that American brings to bear.

For regular Transatlantic travellers the prospect of the world's largest airline alliances doing battle for business is glorious. The hope is that in the end, flying from London to New York will always be as cheap as flying to Glasgow.

Richard Quest is BBC Correspondent in New York who crosses the Atlantic an average of 30 times a year.

It's not just stocks and shares that go up and down in The City.



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BUSINESS TRAVEL

Docklands no longer badlands



On the waterfront: City Airport in London's Docklands

Photograph: Geraint Lewis

How many times have you been in the position I found myself last Monday, touching down 30 minutes late at Heathrow because of air traffic control congestion, then waiting a further half-hour for the baggage to catch up? The contrast with my journey yesterday was marked: I arrived in London on time, and within 20 minutes was in the office.

The secret, as you may well have guessed, is that I flew into London City airport. Since the Docklands airport opened a decade ago, no-one has denied its convenience. But only this year has it acquired the momentum of a route network necessary to sustain itself and ease the burden of its backers.

When London City first opened, you could travel to just two destinations in one kind of aircraft. Paris and Amsterdam were on offer, using Dash-7 propeller aircraft. Even the best inflight service could not disguise the fact that these were small, slow and noisy. New routes came and went, but London City proved a financial drain on the resources of its backers.

The turning point took place one Sunday morning in the summer of 1988, when a well-executed air show demonstrated that jet aircraft could use the Docklands airport without deaf-

ening local residents. Soon British Aerospace 146s were flying from London City, boosting speed, comfort and appeal to business travellers.

Yet still the balance sheet remained stained deeply red. To appeal to business travellers, an airport needs both length and breadth: a long list of possible destinations, and a wide range of departures to each. Only this year has the critical mass finally been attained.

Two main forces have been at work, both of them resulting from developments at London's big two airports. The first is increasing congestion at Heathrow, which has led smaller airlines to see opportunities at an airport only half the distance from the Bank of England compared with Heathrow. Accordingly, the Belgian carrier VLM and CityJet (now divorced from Virgin Atlantic) have forged links to Antwerp, Rotterdam, Dusseldorf and Dublin.

The other impact has come from British Airways, which has yet to offer any services from London City. BA has, however, introduced flights from Gatwick

to Edinburgh in competition with Air UK. The smaller operator felt the route was unable to sustain such intense competition, so moved its Edinburgh flights to London City. Having established a base, Air UK has also introduced services to Amsterdam and Rotterdam, complementing those from its Stansted HQ. Suddenly London City has become significant in aviation.

The journey is still not entirely smooth. World Airlines, which started up its only route from City to Amsterdam, has withdrawn the service. And my own subjective survey of the shuttle buses linking the Docklands airport with Canary Wharf and Liverpool Street station reveals most still running mostly empty. But once the Jubilee Line extension provides better transportation to the east of London, City airport can expect to mature still further.

It could face competition from an unexpected source, though. The most mocked airport in Britain is suddenly a serious contender in aviation. You can still, like Lorraine Chase, be wafted to paradise

from Luton airport. But now you can also reach Scotland's three largest cities and a range of European capitals from Copenhagen to Madrid.

When EasyJet began flying from Luton to Glasgow and Edinburgh a year ago, everyone thought that its £29 (plus £5 tax) fares would appeal strictly to leisure travellers. The inflight service can most politely be compared with London's commuter trains, but with fares undercutting the competition so fiercely about one in three of its passengers are business travellers.

Another reason could be the supreme ease of ticketless travel that the airline pioneered in the UK – once you've tried it, you become a convert, which could be why BA has picked up on the concept for domestic flights.

As the EasyJet network has expanded to Amsterdam, Barcelona and Nice, a new competitor has emerged. Luton-based Debonair aims squarely for the business traveller, with a route network that extends from Newcastle to Rome. It offers high-quality inflight service using BAe 146 equipment.

London City airport: 01895 571111
Luton City airport: 0151-474 5555
Luton airport: 01582 405100

Nightmare of getting to do an 'e'

Hotel room: somewhere to sleep? Think again. Think temporary workstation. Sue Wheat reports

On your next business trip, you might want to go surfing, or you may want to do an 'e'. An e-mail that is. But finding out whether you will be able to communicate electronically from your hotel can be a real challenge, even in today's world of purpose-built hotel business centres.

As the technological age moves in, hotel business centres it seems, are moving out. Like gyms and other "extra" facilities, many executives insist on them when booking but are more likely to end up working in their room.

"The 'ideal' room," says Mike Platt, Director of Commercial Affairs at Hogg Robinson Business Travel International, "has a good desk, a facility for your PC, a fax machine, an e-mail line and a phone line."

The ideal room has a good desk, a facility for your PC, a fax machine, an e-mail line and a phone line

ties, including the Hilton, InterContinental, Hyatt and Swissotel," says Jean Hopkins, Gray Dawes Travel's Hotels Division Manager. "A good example of a business-tailored room is the provision of a unique fax number on check-in that will not be used (at least for a long time) after you check out, thus ensuring that no important faxes go astray."

But if you do find your perfect room-cum-office, sending an e-mail can also be more difficult than it sounds. It's easy enough to plug your lap-top into the room's telephone line, but how does your computer's automatic dial get through the switchboard?

One secret, say globetrotting veterans, is to put a comma after the outside line digit, but before the access number. You should also look on-line for the local access number of your server in the destination you'll be going to before you leave – if you wait until you get there you will end up having to make an international call to log on.

For those who still have a preference for holding face-to-face meetings – rather than communicating over cyberspace – the answer may lie in video conferencing.

If you are staying in New York, the Millenium Broadway Hotel can link you up with colleagues at the office – as long as they've got video conferencing too. If not, they can "meet" with you via one of the UK's six major Copthorne Hotels in London, Birmingham, Manchester or Glasgow (£200 for a day's hotel-to-hotel video conference plus call charges), which have a video conferencing facility on trial for six months.

Posing the question to Hilton international reservations led to a series of telephone calls around Hilton's many departments – Conference and Business, Head Office, Marketing and someone's voice mail, I gave up.

Getting a specialised business travel agent to find out was a more fruitful and less time-consuming method. Faced with the challenge of finding me a hotel in Bristol, Boston, Bulgaria and Botswana to suit a workaholic business traveller's needs, Hogg Robinson found me hotels with business centres and in-room communications facilities in three of the destinations – Bristol, Boston, and Bulgaria. Botswana was the only place where logging on could be a problem.

"Most international hotel chains are providing these facil-

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sport

Seles has no answer to Hingis

Tennis

Martina Hingis, the 16-year-old Swiss girl, gave Monica Seles her greatest defeat as a professional with a shocking 6-2, 6-0 triumph on Sunday in the Bank of the West Classic final in Oakland, California.

Hingis needed only 52 minutes at the Henry J Kaiser Arena to claim victory in her first meeting with the joint world No 2 and top seed in the tournament. The third-seeded Hingis broke Seles's serve in every game except one, and dropped her own serve just once. She committed only five unforced errors and smacked 30 winners compared to Seles's 11.

"I played such a perfect match today, it was unbelievable," said Hingis, who recalled the first time she had encountered Seles.

"It was a long time ago when I met her at Zurich. I was like nine or 10 years old. She went off in a helicopter and gave me an autograph. So today was a little too much for me."

The victory enabled Hingis to exceed the goals she had set for herself in 1996. "This year my hope was to win one of the big tournaments, and now I've won two," she said. "And to play Monica for the first time and win... Wow!"

It was a win even a mother could be proud of. "We thought we'd set Monica try to overpower her, but she was a little off her game today," said Melanie Zogg-Hingis, Martina's mother and coach. "I'm proud of the way Martina played. It is quite a moment for her."

Hingis will rise to No 6 in the rankings after this performance. "There's no doubt she's going to be a force in women's tennis," Seles, the Australian Open champion, said. "She's so smart and she's only going to get better and stronger — that's the scary part."

WOMEN'S RANKINGS: 1 S Graf (Ger); 2 M Seles (USA); 3 A Sanchez Vicario (Spa); 4 C Martinez (Esp); 4 J Novotna (Cz Rep); 6 A Huber (Ger); 6 S M Hingis (Switzerland); 7 L Davenport (USA); 8 G Goto (Jpn); 9 S Stosur (Aust); 10 B Schutz-McCarthy (West); 11 M J Fernández (USA); 12 B Pfaff (Aust); 13 S Spracklen (Aust); 14 S Hingis (Switzerland); 15 S Wozniak (Can); 16 M Heisenberg (Switz); 17 A Cooper (USA); 18 M Pierce (Frt); 19 M Mattek (USA); 20 Ju-dith Wiesner (Aust).

It was the first time Seles had lost a set to love since a 6-3, 6-0 liding from Martina Navratilova at the 1990 Virginia Slims of Washington, and only the fourth "bagel" of her career.

"I kind of knew it was gone at 3-0 in the second set. That's when I first started feeling it," Seles said. "She's so smart. She has all the angles covered."

Hingis conceded she had played nearly flawless tennis against her one-time idol. Seles is the ninth top-10 player Hingis has defeated this year.



Hingis shows Seles her power on the backhand in the final

Photograph: Robin Weiner/AP

Henman and Rusedski lift British stock

British men's tennis reached its highest point for nearly 18 years yesterday with Tim Henman and Greg Rusedski both ranked in the world's top 50 in the latest ATP list.

Not since December 1978, when Buster Mottram was ranked 28 and John Lloyd 57, has Britain had two men ranked in the top 50 at the same time.

Earlier this year Rusedski reached a ranking high of 33,

but at that time Henman had only just broken into the top 100. Then, as Henman, a quarter-finalist at Wimbledon and in the last 16 at the US Open this summer, rocketed up the rankings to 25, Rusedski's form slumped as he slipped to 84.

However, at that low point, Rusedski has been a semi-finalist in Singapore, won the Peking Open and was a quarter-finalist in the Stockholm Open. Ironi-

cally, Henman's recent form has been poor as he has been beaten in the first round in his last three tournaments in Paris, Stuttgart and Moscow.

Henman is now at 27, while Rusedski, who was ranked 53 last week, has moved up to 48. Britain's top two will take time off from chasing ranking points when they compete in the National Championships, which begin at Telford today.

The former British No 1, Jeremy Bates, is to take over from David Felgate as the manager of men's national training at the Lawn Tennis Association.

Bates, who was Britain's leading player for nearly a decade, retired from active play after Wimbledon this year. He said: "I have been involved with British tennis for so long and I still wanted to be involved." Bates, who will take up his

new post on 1 January, will oversee the training and development of Britain's senior players and will also be responsible for the appointment and management of coaches. He will also play on the seniors tour.

Felgate is to work almost full-time with Henman on the ATP Tour from January, but he will also be available to the LTA in assisting coaches with the development of juniors.

Chief Hill sends Green Bay packing

American football

MATT TENCH

The edges were further blurred on a campaign already notably lacking in certainties on Sunday when five divisional leaders were beaten, and the likely participants in this season's Super Bowl became just that little bit more difficult to predict.

Perhaps the biggest surprise came in Arrowhead Stadium where the visiting Green Bay Packers pitted their league-leading defense against a Kansas City offense that has been much doubted in recent weeks. The Chiefs had a grip on the game early, notching 17 second-quarter points, and won more comfortably than the 27-20 scoreline suggests. Greg Hill had touchdown runs of eight and 24 yards and hauled in a 34-yard pass for another score as the home side amped 383 yards.

It was only the Pack's second defeat of the season, but any encouragement it may have offered the other pretenders in the NFC was offset by the fact that most of them lost as well. Philadelphia, fresh from a thrilling win in Dallas, were beaten by Buffalo, who sacked Ty Detmer five times. If defeat to the Bills was understandable — Marv Levy's team are the most resilient in the league — the one suffered by Washington will take a lot more explaining.

They gave up 52 yards to the aging arm of Arizona's Boomer Esiason, a quarterback whose prime was not so much in another year as another decade. The Cardinals prevailed 37-34, with Kevin Butler's winning 32-yard field goal coming 33 seconds from the end of overtime.

The demise of the Skins and Eagles allowed the Dallas Cowboys to move within a game of them at the top of the NFC East following their victory in San Francisco. A game that lived up to expectations ended with Steve Young concussed once again, but perhaps feeling a little better about his long-term future the Bay Area.

Young had guided his team to a 10-0 lead by the end of the first quarter, but two vicious hits by Broderick Thomas saw him replaced by Elvis Grbac and almost immediately the 49ers lost their offensive momentum. The Cowboys cleared their way back, but when Troy Aikman was intercepted with a few minutes left it seemed the home side had done enough.

On the next play, though, Grbac compounded an already unconvincing display by giving the ball straight back to the Cowboys with a disastrous pass over the middle to Fred Strickland. Aikman made the most of the opportunity, throwing for an

equalising touchdown and then masterminding the game-winning drive in overtime which culminated with Chris Boniol's 29-yard field goal.

With Grbac's contract expiring at the end of this season there has been speculation that he may succeed Young sooner rather than later — speculation that the 49ers have done little to douse. Grbac's performance against Dallas may remind the powers that be that Grbac may be nine years younger than Young, but he is a long way from being his equal.

In the AFC, the principal surprise was the defeat of the Pittsburgh Steelers by a Cincinnati team that has won all three of its games since Bruce Coslet succeeded Dave Shula as head coach. The Steelers remain strong contenders for the AFC Championship, but will surely have to beat Denver to win the title. The Broncos bucked the trend on a weekend of surprises, their win in Chicago giving them the best record in the league.

NFL RESULTS AND STANDINGS

	W	L	T	PF	PA
Pittsburgh	7	3	0	288	242
Washington	7	3	0	285	239
Philadelphia	6	4	0	208	205
Arizona	4	6	0	194	193
New York Giants	4	6	0	157	169
Cincinnati	1	7	0	147	147
Green Bay	6	5	0	144	154
Minnesota	5	6	0	165	192
Detroit	4	5	0	157	187
Chicago	2	7	0	152	185
Tampa Bay	2	8	0	112	126
Seattle	W	L	T	PF	PA
San Francisco	7	3	0	234	152
St Louis	3	8	0	201	290
New Orleans	2	9	0	152	225
Atlanta	1	9	0	176	303

Hampstead's cup challenge

Hockey

BILL COLWILL

and then knocked Jersey out of the Cup with a convincing 5-1 win — Crowley again scoring twice.

Ipswich, from the Adams East Premier, beat Cambridge University 3-1 in the league, Andy Cook collecting the goals, and then, in the Cup, defeated National League side Bromley 5-0 with Cook and Andy Beresford each scoring twice. In the only other fixture between non-National League sides Chelmsford won a 4-0 win at Bournemouth, thanks to a couple of goals from Mark Crowley. Non-league giantkillers Cam-

bridge City and Anchors entertain difficult ties. Cambridge travel to Premier Guildford, Anchors entertain current First Division leaders, Beeston. The Cup holders, Reading, have a home draw against Firebrands where their goalkeeper Simon Mason and leading striker Mark Pearson will be facing their old club. In the only Premier League meeting, past Cup winners Southgate and East Grinstead meet in north London.

Draw, Digest, page 27

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C - Deion Sanders

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1. Name the Atlanta Falcons quarterback who has started his job this season after a mid-game row with his coach?

A - Jeff George
B - Boobie Bell
C - Troy Aikman

2. Name the San Francisco 49ers quarterback who led the team to 4 Super Bowl victories?

A - Steve Young
B - Joe Montana
C - Elvis Grbac

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LONG-TERM WINNER: Sheriff John (1.50) has won 11 of his last 14 races from Newmarket.

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sport

Dovecote primed for Cup coup



Phil Shaw visits Shepshed, home to O'Kane's giant-killing gang – bar Bah

In the grand tradition of the provincial evening paper which once gained notoriety for headlines like "Town not to move for Royle" and "Toshack not set to sign for Town", *The Independent* can exclusively reveal that Ibrahim Bah will not be in the Shepshed Dynamo side at Carlisle United on Saturday.

Now that may not seem like hold-the-back-page material, especially since the player re-Christened "Brian" at Shepshed has still to make so much as a substitute's appearance for the mid-table minnows from the Midland Division of the Dr Martens (Southern) League. Yet Bah has been creating headlines of his own in the build-up to the first-round tie, and not solely on account of the obliging brevity of his surname.

Bah is a midfield player whose 30 caps for Sierra Leone include tangles with Tony Yeboah and George Weah and an appearance in the African Nations Cup finals last January. He fell into Shepshed's lap early this season after turning up to enrol at the university in neighbouring Loughborough. The FA has accepted the transfer of his registration from Port Authority FC, only for the Department of Employment to argue that he is an "entertainer" who would be preventing a British player from earning a living.

His degree course does not start until next September, so

Shepshed needed to confirm a work permit for Bah by midnight last Friday in order for him to be eligible to play at Brunton Park. Unfortunately, the wheels of bureaucracy ground too slowly.

Mark O'Kane, whose predecessors as manager include Martin O'Neill and Ian Storey-Moore, was already resigned to being without him as he watched his squad (minus Bah) work out in a downpour at Shepshed's tiny Dovecote ground. "It would have given me

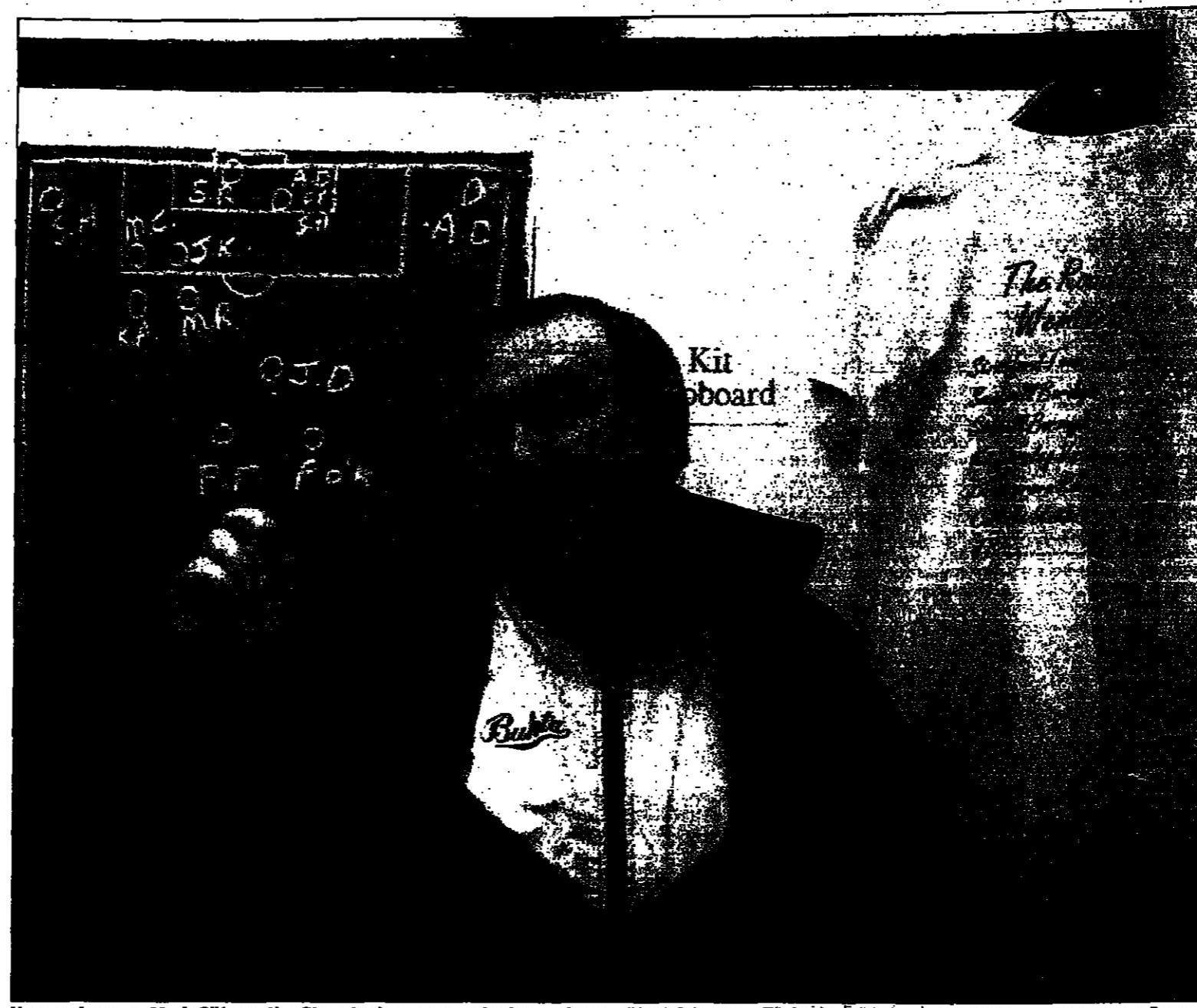
a problem about who to leave out, and he might not have been match fit, but decisions like that are my job."

He played in a practice match the other week and scored from 40 yards.

The keeper couldn't move before it hit the net. I've seen the videos, I've watched him training, and he's class."

Carlisle would be advised to resist feeling smug about Bah's absence from the 450-mile round trip from Leicestershire. Shepshed's pedigree may be a modest one, with financial crises and changes of identity and status peaking their 106 years, but O'Kane is steadfast in his insistence on "real quality".

To that end he has secured the services of Paul Bancroft and Jon Clark, both of whom had full-time experience with Derby County. Bancroft later played at Wembley for Kidderminster while Tommy Docherty brought



Human dynamo: Mark O'Kane, the Shepshed manager, who leads the smallest club in the FA Cup to Carlisle on Saturday. Photograph: Peter Jay

Clark to the Baseball Ground from Manchester United, though, according to O'Kane, they play for love rather than money at Shepshed.

"We haven't got a big budget like in the days when the club was called Shepshed Charterhouse and then Albion in the 1980s. I've seen the figures and they're frightening. I also heard that Stafford Rangers (in the same division) have a weekly wage bill of £2,500. Ours isn't a fifth of that, and not one of my players is on contract."

In the words of Ku Akredolu, the captain, "We are not Rushden & Diamonds, you know," a reference to the megastar Vauxhall Conference club. Instead, Shepshed find O'Kane's reputation in semi-pro circles for playing "proper foot-

ball" helps Shepshed to bridge the gap in resources. When Bancroft was between League clubs he persuaded him to play for Carriage & Wagon, a works team he ran, and the midfielder renewed the acquaintance in the face of more lucrative offers last summer.

The spirit within the squad is epitomised by Pete Hall. Although his van clung into the car park 10 minutes late for training, there was no recrimination from the gaffer. Hall travels from Stoke-on-Trent, 75 miles away, and yet he is not currently in the team and there is no reserve side.

Shepshed are arguably the smallest club left in the competition, regularly drawing gates of fewer than 200. In the spring they won promotion from the

Interlink Midland Alliance, and O'Kane admitted he was "pleasantly surprised" with the way they have adjusted to the higher level.

Their Third Division hosts should also be warned that they are the only team in the country with three trophies on the sideboard already this season. "We won the Interlink President's Cup, the charity shield for the league, and a memorial trophy for a past secretary of ours who died, all before the start of the real season. I said to the chairman: 'Well, you can't sack me this week.'

Their run to the first round proper, for only the second time in the history of the various Shepshed outfits, began before 125 spectators at Stratford-upon-Avon back when the county's cricket club had still to clinch the Cheltenham Cup. Counting replays they have already played seven games in the Cup, dispatching the might of Sandwell, Solihull and Knypersley Victoria before a 2-0 victory over Brinsford of the Conference a fortnight ago.

Nearly a thousand were at the Dovecote that day, packing the clubhouse to the rafters that O'Kane could not get near the television to hear the draw. "I just heard this roar go up," he recalled. "But we couldn't have done much better. Preston or Burnley away would have been a bigger crowd, but Carlisle are hoping for about 6,000. We could make about £15,000, which would be a fortune to us."

As the players pounded round the pitch, the club secretary, Peter Bull, was in the bar supervising the brisk sale of tickets for the trek to Cumbria. November is hardly T-shirt time, but Shepshed's "Road to Wembley" design, complete with Moscow Dynamo-style "D" motif, is also going well. The back lists their victims, with Carlisle on the primitivite line followed by an optimistic "TBA" for the second round.

And who knows, if they do make it through, then Shepshed may be able to summon the clout of Africa in the next round. But why the nickname? O'Kane explained: "The players just said: 'Ibrahim? Oh bugger, we'll call you Brian'. He liked it, so it stuck."

Scotland still bitter about Estonia

RUPERT METCALF

Even as they celebrated Sunday's World Cup win over Sweden, Scotland were still being distracted by the Estonia saga. Jim Fury, the chief executive of the Scottish Football, remains unhappy with the way Fifa, football's world governing body, has handled the aftermath of last month's abortive trip to Tallinn.

Scotland went to the top of Group Four thanks to their 1-0 victory over Sweden, even though they were without their suspended captain, Gary McAllister, who only learned on Friday that the suspension he should have served in Estonia would have to be served against the Swedes instead. Fifa ruled last week that the Scots must replay the qualifier for which the Estonians failed to turn up, after Fifa brought forward the kick-off time on 9 October.

"There are more questions than answers over this," Fury said. "There are causes for concern." The Scots are unhappy that although David Will, a vice-president of the SFA, left Thursday's Fifa meeting in Zurich while the Estonia affair was being discussed, Sweden's Leonard Johansson, a Fifa vice-president, did not do likewise.

Johansson said at the weekend that he may report Fury to Fifa's disciplinary committee over alleged remarks made by the Scot in response to the governing body's decision to reschedule the Estonia game and ban McAllister for Sunday's match. Fury responded yesterday that he is willing to go to Zurich to meet Fifa officials: "There was major disruption to our team. It was an unusual disruption which we would hope would never be repeated for any country," Fury said.

Fifa has ordered Estonia to meet Scotland by 16 March next year. "We are still awaiting news on where and when the game will be played," Craig Brown, Scotland's coach, said. "The players will be up for that one, that is for sure." The Scots then have home games against Estonia on 29 March and Austria on 2 April – the latter probably at Celtic Park.

Clubs to embrace divisions

Rugby Union

CHRIS HEWITT

Now that all the fuss surrounding Phil de Glanville's appointment as England captain has subsided, at least until next week's build-up to the Italy international begins in earnest, rugby's politicians are ready to return to their accustomed place on centre stage. But after nine months in which no one has managed to agree with anybody about anything, tomorrow's meeting of the leading Courage League clubs in Northampton will have a conciliatory air about it.

Epruc, the umbrella organisation representing the senior English professional clubs, is still in dispute with the Rugby Football Union over money and broadcasting rights and would, given half a chance, disagree with the governing body about

the best way to solve the crisis in Zaire as well. Tomorrow, however, Epruc is expected to soften its stance by holding out an olive branch – even an entire olive tree – to the RFU.

Signals from inside the Epruc camp suggest that the clubs will abandon their militant resistance to the forthcoming programme of divisional matches with three touring sides – Queensland, the Junior Springboks and Argentina – and release both players and facilities. Such a move would save the RFU the considerable embarrassment of fielding pitifully under-strength teams against high-quality sides who have flown thousands of miles in search of meaningful competition.

In addition, the clubs are likely to agree to the RFU vetoes enshrined in the now infamous document foisted on the rebels at the brief and bad-tempered meeting between the two sides on

22 October. "All we want is some sort of formal definition of how, and under what circumstances, the vetoes might be applied," one Epruc source said yesterday.

If the member clubs unite behind a slightly amended version of the RFU document tomorrow, Epruc will seek an early meeting in an attempt to reach a final settlement.

However, the controversy is looming over the future congestion caused by Ireland's and, to a lesser extent, Scotland's international commitments. Last week, four major league fixtures were cancelled because of an Ireland squad session and unless some compromise is hammered out quickly, the same situation will arise on 28 December, 4 January and 18–dates on which Bristol, Saracens, London Irish and Newcastle among others, will expect to field their Celtic exiles in vital club matches.

Bath will be without two key players in Saturday's European Cup quarter-final at Cardiff. The flanker Richard Webster has broken a knuckle joint on his right hand, while the hooker Graham Davey has a dislocated elbow.

England A squad, Digest, page 27

Irish bid to keep top players

The Irish Rugby Football Union has unveiled plans to halve the exodus of players from Ireland by spending up to £3m on contracts for leading players.

The proposals, involving a three-tier structure designed to encourage the Irish players now with English clubs to return home, were announced by the IRFU president, Bobby Deacy, in Dublin yesterday and will be put to leading clubs next Sunday.

Deacy said: "Our aim is to make it less attractive to play abroad. And we are determined to put a structure in place which will entice our top players back to Ireland and which will discourage other players from leaving."

The Union also aims to increase the number of full internationals to be played in the season, which will help to finance the deal.

The IRFU intends to structure the game to embrace the

clubs, provinces and the national sides. If clubs agree to the recommendations, the plans will be implemented over an initial three-year period.

For more immediate interest for the Irish is tonight's launch of their international season against Western Samoa in Dublin. And the tease prospect of Va'aiga Tuigamala's return to the game at international level will be seen as the greatest threat to Irish ambitions.

Ireland's New Zealand-born coach, Murray Kidd, is well versed in Tuigamala's abilities. He played for the All Blacks for three years before making the switch to rugby league in 1994.

Kidd believes Tuigamala's time is underestimated them. Ireland's team manager, Pat Whelan, said: "Their back division is exceptionally strong, although they may be short of a few first team players."

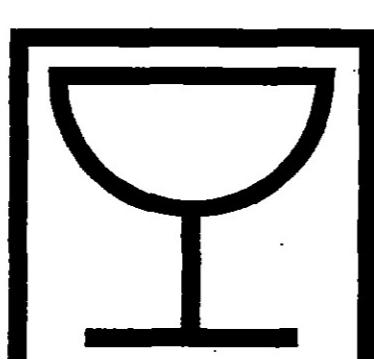
Ireland are keen to get their season off to a winning start. It

is their first game since they were humbled 70-38 by the Barbarians last May.

Ireland, who named the Exiles centre Rob Henderson and Ballymena wing James Topping as debutants, have been forced to make one late change. The Newcastle prop, Nick Popplewell, pulled a hamstring in training at the weekend which gives a first start to Moseley's Henry Hurley, who came on as a temporary replacement against Fiji last season.

IRELAND (v Western Samoa, Lansdowne Road, tonight): S Meakin (Richmond); R Wall (Sunderland), R Henderson (London Wasps), D Horne (Leeds), D McIlroy (London), I. H. Hayes (Oxford University), cap: N Hurley (Moseley), A Clarke (Northampton), P Wall (Llanelli), J. D. G. Jones (Cardiff), D McBride (Moseley), P Johnson (Sunderland), M Field (Nottingham), P Burke (Bristol), S. J. Williams (London), M. Murphy (Shannon), S. Hayes (London), I. Dermott (Lansdowne).

WESTERN SAMOA: V Peta; O Soata, T Vave, G. R. Tapau, T. Tuigamala, E. V. Lai, J. Lai, P. Leavasa, M. Sione, S. Taala, I. Fonua, P. Lam (cap), R. Ropati, M. Faletau, T. Fonua, F. Fonua, P. R. V. Vaka, J. Fonua, I. R. Lai, G. Lai, R. Peta.



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Bass

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